

The Global RFID Interoperability Forum for Standards met in Washington, D.C., to establish a permanent body to foster communication and collaboration among RFID standards bodies.

By Mark Roberti

July 3, 2009—The [Global RFID Interoperability Forum for Standards](#) (GRIFS), on June 30, held a gathering of representatives from a variety of standards-making organizations from around the world at the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#) (CSIS), in Washington, D.C.. The aim was to present GRIFS' goals, and to share the first version of a possible memorandum of understanding (MOU) that could lead to making the forum a permanent body to foster communication and collaboration among the many bodies worldwide that establish standards for radio frequency identification technology.

GRIFS is funded by the European Commission, with the aim of maximizing the interoperability of RFID standards. Since GRIFS was launched in January 2008, it has been conducting meetings with representatives of standards bodies around the world (see [GS1, ETSI, CEN Establish Global RFID Standards Forum](#) and [GRIFS Issues Interim Report](#)).

GRIFS has prepared a 217-page report, entitled "[RFID Standardization State of the Art](#)," which identifies the organizations currently creating RFID standards. These include the [International Organization for Standardization](#) (ISO), the [International Electrotechnical Commission](#) (IEC), the [IEEE](#), the [International Telecommunications Union](#) (ITU-T), the [European Committee for Standardization](#) (CEN) and the [European Telecommunications Standards Institute](#) (ETSI).



GS1's Henri Barthel

The report also summarizes the types of standards being created. GRIFS' researchers have identified 125 RFID standards that have been created thus far. These include standards for air interface protocols, as well as others for tag data, and for ensuring standard conformance.

GS1 has been coordinating the GRIFS effort, along with CEN and ETSI. Most of the above groups were represented at the meeting in Washington, along with [EPCglobal](#), [AIM Global](#), the [National Institute of Standards and Technology](#) (NIST) and others.

Henri Barthel, director of global partnerships and projects at GS1's global office in Brussels, and the GRIFS project coordinator, spelled out the project's goals. There is not a lot of consistency in RFID standards development, he said, and GRIFS would be a voluntary coordination effort to address the issue.

One example cited during the meeting was the work being done to create an RFID emblem that can be used globally to indicate that a particular product, or its packaging, contains an RFID tag. EPCglobal created an Electronic Product Code (EPC) emblem, then AIM Global created a broader RFID emblem

of its own that includes EPC and other types of RFID tags, and now work is being done in Europe on yet another emblem.

One goal is to create a database of RFID standards, so that bodies around the world could see which standards already exist, and either adopt them or ensure that anything they create interoperates with international RFID standards. So, for instance, those creating an emblem could check the database and see that an emblem standard already existed.

"The goal is to create a neutral, voluntary body that will issue resolutions or suggestions that will be taken on board—or not—by the participating standards bodies," Barthel told the gathering. "Standards are being created in many areas, so we need to prioritize which areas to focus on."

While there seemed to be general agreement at the meeting that there needs to be better communication and coordination among RFID standards bodies, attendees were divided regarding whether GRIFS was necessary. Some felt it was; there is clearly a great deal of overlap, and a growing number of industry bodies, including [Odette International](#), the [Automotive Industry Action Group \(AIAG\)](#), the [Air Transport Association \(ATA\)](#) and so forth, are developing standards for using RFID within their sector.

A representative from ITU-T felt there is already a committee within the ITU that is charged with coordinating RFID standards. Others pointed out that Steve Halliday, president of [High Tech Aid](#), produces a monthly newsletter that includes updates on global RFID standards efforts. And [Q.E.D. Systems](#), an organization that provides standards development, educational, advisory and systems design services, maintains an extensive database of RFID standards at autoid.org.

After the public meeting, the leading standards bodies were invited to a closed-door gathering to discuss a proposed memorandum of understanding that would establish GRIFS as an ongoing forum for coordination. If these bodies don't agree to participate on a voluntary basis, the GRIFS effort will likely not continue. It might be several weeks before the potential participants could agree on and sign an MOU.

EU funding runs out at the end of this year, so if the bodies fail to agree to participate on a voluntary basis, the GRIFS effort will likely cease. If they do agree, however, the individual bodies will fund their members' participation in GRIFS. Barthel was optimistic that they would support GRIFS.

"The number of attendees, the questions raised and the discussion [at the public event in Washington] demonstrated the high interest for what we are trying to achieve with this project," Barthel said. "There are some challenges ahead, but I feel confident that we will succeed in setting up a global coordination forum on RFID standardization that will bring a genuine added value to the standard bodies—and, more importantly, to the users."