

# U.S. Military to Issue RFID Mandate

**Exclusive:** Following in Wal-Mart's footsteps, the U.S. Department of Defense plans to ask its top 100 suppliers to put RFID tags on shipments.

Sept. 15, 2003 - *RFID Journal* has learned that the U.S. Department of Defense plans to ask its top 100 suppliers to put RFID tags on pallets, cases and big-ticket items. The military intends to spell out its plans in detail sometime next summer, but it is believed that tagging could begin in 2005.

Sources say that Alan Estevez, the assistant deputy under secretary of defense for supply chain integration, will inform the top 100 suppliers of its intentions by the end of this month. Estevez was unavailable to comment.

*RFID Journal's* sources say that the military intends to be an early implementer of EPC technology. But Ed Coyle, head of the IT enterprise integration group at the Defense Logistics Agency, told the *Journal*: "We are definitely endorsing RFID tags, but it would be premature to endorse EPC until [AutoID Inc.] releases their specifications." AutoID Inc. is a joint venture set up by EAN International and the Uniform Code Council (UCC) to commercialize EPC technology.

Sources say that the Department of Defense (DOD) has been in touch with senior executives at Wal-Mart to learn what the retailer is doing and how RFID technology can be applied to the military, which has the largest supply chain in the world. It's not clear whether Estevez will set a specific date for tagging, but one source says: "If Wal-Mart's top 100 suppliers can do it within 18 to 24 months, then we don't see why our top 100 suppliers can't."

The military is already one of the leaders in using RFID technology. Currently all pallets sent to the Gulf and Afghanistan are tagged. Containers are tracked around the world using active (battery-powered) tags from Savi Technology. The DOD would apparently like to have suppliers tag not just pallets and cases, but also put active tags on containers and eventually GPS devices on all shipments to provide perfect visibility.

There is some concern in the military about whether EPC technology can be used in the military supply chain. One issue is whether EPC will become a true standard. The military wants to ensure complete interoperability between products from different vendors. AutoID Inc. has set up an Implementation Task Force to formulate standards. But Mike Di Yeso, the UCC's chief operating officer, says that it's too early to say when standards will be finalized (see Code Warriors: Driving EPC Forward).

The DOD suppliers are among the largest companies in the world. The top 100 would include Boeing, General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon. If the military does endorse EPC technology for tracking goods in the military supply chain, it could help spread EPC technology throughout the manufacturing sector because military's top 100 suppliers also have divisions that make commercial airplanes, electronic components, trucks, ships and other products.

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