

# DOD Seeks RFID Interoperability

The U.S. Department of Defense is working with the International Organization for Standardization and EPCglobal to promote synergies for RFID users.

Nov. 3, 2003—For the past four years, the Auto-ID Center and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) have been working on separate RFID standards. End users of RFID technology believe there would be significant benefits if the two standards merged or were at least interoperable. One of those end users is the U.S. Department of Defense, which recently announced plans to track pallets and cases with passive RFID tags.

"We are very active with EPCglobal and with ISO," says Ed Coyle, chief of the DOD Logistics Automatic Identification Technology Office. "Both organizations are trying to accomplish the same goal—bring some order to the data collection and identification effort. The more work we can do to bring those standards organizations to an interoperable level, the better off the DOD will be."

Some industry observers made much of the fact that the DOD's recent memo outlining its RFID strategy stressed that it wanted to use EPC technology while being ISO-compliant (see [U.S. Military Clarifies RFID Mandate](#)). The military hopes those two goals will not be mutually exclusive. Coyle says the DOD would like to play, and has been encouraged to play, an active role in both organizations to help make that possible.

This is a big issue for the military because its supply chain encompasses more sectors than any other, including automotive, aviation, electronics, munitions, pharmaceutical and retail. All of these industries want to use RFID to boost supply chain efficiencies, but if each develops its own standard, the DOD won't have a single way to track everything it buys.

"We want to try to encourage each industry to move toward the same standard," says Coyle. "We have general support within each of those groups to reduce the number of standards out there or to make them interoperable."

To that end, member's of Coyle's staff sit on ISO committees and on committees set up by EPCglobal, the joint venture created by the EAN International and the Uniform Code Council to commercialize EPC technology. "We're not trying to dictate [what the standards should be]," he says. "We're trying to find common ground, so we can deploy systems that are interoperable in all of our supply chain environments."

Members of both EPCglobal and ISO's RFID committees see the need for common ground. Also, more technology vendors are now involved with both groups, and the Uniform Code Council has been a strong supporter of both EPC technology and ISO standards.

The DOD is also working to merge its own Unique Identification (UID) numbering system with the ISO and EPCglobal. UID was designed to uniquely identify tangible assets that are of high value, dangerous or need to be tracked individually for another reason. The DOD will use the UID to improve financial accounting and asset management. The DOD is working with ISO and EPCglobal to try to make the UID fully interoperable with their data standards.

Some have speculated that we could have a situation similar to that of electronic article surveillance tags today, where some retailers use one system and others a different one. That forces suppliers to manage two sets of inventory. But Coyle doesn't envision that happening with RFID. "The Defense Department will work as hard as we can to make sure that that doesn't happen," he says. "It's in the Defense Department's best interests—and the economy's best interests—that we have full interoperability."

[RFID Journal Home](#)

Nearly 95 percent of attendees at RFID Journal University in New York said they would recommend the program to a colleague. There's still time to sign up for the final RFID Journal University in Chicago on Nov. 17. Register now by visiting [RFID Journal University](#), or call 510-832-1501.

Copyright ©2005 RFID Journal, Inc. All Rights Reserved