

U.S. Seeks Intra-Agency Council

The U.S. Department of Defense is seeking to create an intra-government RFID council to coordinate adoption plans and ensure that all departments are using the same technology.

By Mark Roberti

Apr. 9, 2004—At a meeting with suppliers of goods to the military in Washington, D.C., this week, representatives from the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) said they were seeking to establish an intra-government RFID council to coordinate adoption plans and ensure that all government departments are using a single standard technology.

"We've jointly decided that we need an intra-government council going," said Ed Coyle, the chief of the DOD Logistics Automatic Identification Technology (AIT) Office. "I don't see a lot of inconsistency with what the other government agencies are doing. We all agree we should be [using the same technology]."

Coyle said that the DOD has already been sharing RFID information and working with the United States Postal Service, the General Services Administration (which provides office supplies to federal government agencies), the Food and Drug Administration, the Transportation Security Administration and other government bodies.

If the various agencies agree to participate in the proposed intra-government council, the first meeting would not be held for at least two months, DOD representatives said. The benefits of a coordinated approach, they said, could include the ability to share experience gained regarding RFID-enabled IT systems and best practices and the ability to make volume purchases that would drive down the cost of RFID tags and readers.

The DOD is ahead of most other agencies and private companies in deploying Electronic Product Code (EPC) technology. It has two first-phase projects underway, has done a technology proof-of-concept demonstration and has two more implementations planned. The U.S. Postal Service is believed to be the only other agency with an EPC pilot currently underway. (TSA has several border security applications in place that do not use EPC tags.)

Each agency will have to assess its own needs and decide what technologies are most appropriate. But a coordinated approach, if adopted by U.S. government agencies, could have a significant impact on the adoption of EPC technology. Companies supplying goods to more than one agency would be able to use the same tags on their inventory, whether it was going to a DOD unit or the TSA (or a customer outside of the government).

The huge volume of EPC tags and readers consumed by U.S. government bodies and their suppliers could also help drive down the overall price of the technology. Coyle said that the DOD was standardizing on EPC technology because the DOD wants to leverage the benefits that come with using the same technology being adopted by Wal-Mart, Target, Albertsons and European retailers. If other agencies adopt RFID, they are likely to want to leverage those same benefits.

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