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## Next-Generation EPCIS

The Electronic Product Code Information Services (EPCIS) standard provides a way for companies to capture and share EPC data automatically. EPCIS defines an event-tagged items leaving a warehouse, for example—providing visibility into the supply chain. It lets businesses focus on the what, when, where and why of the event, without having to worry about how the RFID infrastructure captured the data.

In the five years since EPCIS was first published, it has proven extremely versatile, yet there are some business situations that can't be expressed naturally in the EPCIS language. With this in mind, GS1 recently kicked off a new working group within its Global Standards Management Process to create the next version of EPCIS. The upgraded standard is being designed to be fully backward-compatible with the existing EPCIS standard, and will expand the EPCIS language to handle business situations not expressed easily today.



One expected enhancement is the ability to trace objects identified by a batch or lot code. Existing EPCIS structures expect each object to be listed separately by its unique serial number. But in the health-care sector, for example, certain items, such as sutures and gloves, are identified by their manufacturing lot, rather than by a unique serial number on each suture or glove. The new EPCIS feature would allow an event to indicate one or more lots, as well as the number of items from each lot code that took part in the event. In addition, new EPCIS structures would show packing and unpacking of lot-identified items from a container, complementing the existing EPCIS structure that describes packing and unpacking of serialized items.

Another anticipated enhancement is the ability to handle "transformations." In the food-processing industry, for example, many companies grind together different cuts of meat to make packages of hamburger. The transformation of one thing into another occurs in many manufacturing industries as well.

The new EPCIS structure would allow both a list of inputs consumed and a list of outputs produced to be carried in the same event.

It's also likely the working group will standardize data that many implementations today include through proprietary customization, such as "ship from" and "ship to" information, packaging levels and vocabulary used in pharmaceutical e-pedigrees. Standardizing this data will lead to greater cross-business and cross-industry interoperability.

The work is just beginning, so now is an excellent time to get involved in GS1 to help bring EPCIS to the next maturity level. End users and solution providers who use EPCIS—or are considering deploying RFID tracking within their supply chains—are encouraged to join, to help ensure EPCIS evolves to meet the needs of their industries, including health care, food processing, manufacturing and transportation.

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