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## The “Bar Codes on Steroids” Hearing

This week, several leading RFID tags were called to testify before a U.S. Congressional committee investigating the use of illegal substances in the automatic identification industry. While the combative session didn't get as much attention as the investigation of steroid use in baseball, the testimony

was important in determining the future of RFID.

The hearing was sparked by the book *Juiced: Wild Times, Rampant 'Roids, Smash Hits and How RFID Got Big*, which was written by a retired ISO 18000-6 tag that claimed many popular UHF tags routinely used steroids in order to deliver performance that bar codes just can't match.



The proceedings were held in an unused storage room in the Capitol. The committee's chairman read an opening statement. "This committee is not on a witch hunt," he said. "Our goal is to ensure a level playing field, to make sure no technology has an unfair advantage. We want to uphold the integrity of the data capture industry."

Members of the committee grilled representatives from EPCglobal about their testing policy. "You are supposed to be setting standards," said one Congressman. "You are supposed to be testing these tags. Right now, there are no tests to ensure compliance—and no penalties for use of illegal performance-enhancing substances."

EPCglobal representatives said that they are working on tests and a compliance policy and that they will soon be place soon. Tags that don't comply will be banned from the auto-ID industry. They denied encouraging steroid use, but admitted that people want to see longer read range and better performance.

After a recess for lunch, several stars of the auto-ID industry were called to testify under oath. Here are excerpts

from their comments.

“Longer read-range, faster read rates, no line of sight—how could these things possibly be achieved without performance-enhancing drugs? We don’t stand a chance against them.” —a 30-year-old UPC bar code

“With all due respect to the committee, I have achieved a high level of performance, but look at me. Does it look like I’m on steroids?” —*Alien Squiggle Tag*

“Flex is about being flexible, not about flexing muscle. Braun doesn’t necessarily make you perform better in the field.” —*Avery Triflex*

“I categorically deny that I’ve ever used steroids. I may have a problem with anger management, but it is not ‘roid rage.’”

—*Rafsec “demon tag”*

“I regret that some young bar codes might be using illegal substances to try to compete with RFID tags.” —*Alien M tag*

The Symbol 4 by 4 and Intermec IntelliTag were excused from testifying because their testimony could prejudice an on-going court case.

At the conclusion of the hearings, the committee said it would need more time to study the issue. Several of the RFID tags said after the grilling that the committee was a joke. Said one: “Don’t these people understand that ‘bar codes on steroids’ is just a term to help people who don’t get RFID?”

*Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below.*



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