

DDC to Expand Uses for RFID

By Jessica Walter-Groft, DDC Command Affairs

During a recent Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Forum, officials from the Department of Defense (DoD), DLA and the Defense Distribution Center (DDC) met to discuss the implementation of new passive RFID technology that will have the ability to track each item on its way through the supply chain.

The use of RFID technology may help to minimize human error, reduce the logistical footprint, improve data accuracy and enhance asset visibility.



During the RFID Forum, Nicholas Tsougas (standing) of DoD's AIT Office describes the characteristics of Radio Frequency Identification.

DoD currently operates the largest end-to-end active RFID system in the world, and DoD will be an early adopter of the new passive RFID technology, mandating that all suppliers put passive RFID tags on case and pallet levels beginning January 2005.

DLA and DDC currently use active RFID tags on Air Lines of Communication (ALOC) pallets and seavans that are sent to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). The tags are "active" because they transmit a signal that can be picked up by a receiver.

Passive RFID technology does not constantly transmit a signal. Instead, a reader is used to activate the tag and requests the information that has been burned onto the tag. By utilizing passive RFID tags, DDC hopes to add value to receiving and shipping processes, provide an automated inventory count and ensure accurate consumption data.

The passive RFID tags contain an electronic product code (EPC) unique to each item, allowing it to be tracked from factory to foxhole. "Just as every automobile has a Vehicle Identification Number, each item has a distinct EPC," said Nicholas Tsougas of the DoD Automatic Identification Technology Office. Passive RFID tags will further be used to identify the contents of each layer of packaging as well, including the carton or box, pallet or multipack container, seavan or ALOC pallet going to the Warfighter.

DDC Logistics Support Division Chief, Pat Kuntz, says this is a big step in the right direction. "Active RFID has been a tremendous asset for increasing visibility along the supply chain, and now passive RFID will help us to decrease the time needed for processing shipments to the Warfighters while saving taxpayers' dollars at the same time."

Although the use of passive RFID tags would require DLA to purchase new tags and readers, DoD officials say that the use of passive RFID tags will save taxpayer money by reducing total ownership costs. "The RFID system can link to large amounts of product data on the Internet, instead of residing on the tags themselves, thereby allowing the use of less expensive passive tags," explained Tsougas.

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A paper label with RFID inside and a chip attached, passive RFID tags like this one will be used to track items through the supply chain.