

newsworthy trends

Can Technology “Chip” Away At Privacy?

(NAPSA)—A wireless technology that’s been around for more than 60 years is raising privacy and security issues for some people.

The technology is RFID—radio frequency identification. Typically, it involves three components: a tag consisting of a microchip and radio antenna; a reader; and a computer system. The tag is attached to or embedded in an item, such as the pass that an employee might use to get into an office building. Information contained on the chip is sent to the reader by radio signals.

The reader translates those signals and delivers the information to the computer system, which may be connected to databases containing more information. According to the National Consumers League, the nation’s oldest consumer advocacy organization, information about the person using the item may be stored on the chip or in related databases, depending on how the RFID is intended to be used.

In the case of the building entrance pass, for example, the chip may contain the employee’s name, job title and other information, such as whether the person can only access certain parts of the building. The computer system could record when the employee enters and exits the building, even the person’s movement from one part of the building to another—information that would be accessible to the employer.



Advocates say a technology commonly used in security systems may also be collecting information about the people who use it.

There are many uses of RFID technology that don’t involve any personal information. But when data such as health records or bank account numbers is stored in the chips or in databases linked to them, security is crucial. That information can be protected as it’s transmitted and stored by encrypting it—turning it into a code that only authorized users can translate.

Security is also a concern if devices such as key fobs that are equipped with RFID to pay for gas are lost or stolen. One way to keep unauthorized people from using them would be to have the ability to “lock” them.

The use of RFID isn’t always disclosed, but when it is, consumers should look for explanations about privacy and security. For more information about RFID, go to www.nclnet.org/rfid.