

Technology In Our Lives

What Is RFID?

(NAPSA)—RFID—radio frequency identification—has been around for more than 60 years. Today, consumers come into contact with this technology in many forms, from the passes used by employees to enter the buildings where they work to payment cards that can simply hover over—rather than be swiped through—a machine to work.

As RFID is increasingly used in people's daily lives, the National Consumers League, the nation's oldest consumer advocacy organization, says that it's important to know what it is and how it works.

RFID typically 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 employee's building pass. Information contained in the chip is sent to the reader by radio signals. The reader translates those signals and delivers the information to the computer system.

The computer system can use the information in a variety of ways, depending on what it is set up to do. It may be connected to databases that contain additional information. For instance, many consumers are familiar with another form of RFID—the toll pass that drivers can keep inside



Radio frequency identification helps make many transactions more convenient.

their cars to go through tollbooths without having to stop and pay. The chip in the toll pass sends information to a reader located in the tollbooth. This information, the reader's location and the time and date of the reading are then transmitted to a computer system, which may be linked to databases containing other information such as the toll fee and the bank account to be billed for the toll.

RFID is also used to track products as they travel from a manufacturer to a distributor to a retailer and any points in between. Depending on their intended use, RFID systems vary in the amount and sensitivity of the information that the chips contain and the distance from which readers can pick up the signals from the tags.

For more information about RFID, go to www.nclnet.org/rfid.