

Radio Frequency Identification Chips Compromise Privacy

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags are microchips that transmit information through radio frequencies to data receivers.

RFID tags can be found in car keys, passports (in all U.S. passports issued since 2006), drivers' licenses, health insurance cards, gas station key fobs, employee and student IDs, library books, EZ passes, debit and credit cards, store loyalty cards, retail goods, animals (e.g. pets, livestock, etc.) and even human beings (e.g. Alzheimer patients).



How can RFID technology compromise your privacy?

Each RFID tag uses a unique identification number or Electronic Product Code (EPC) that identifies the specific object it is attached to, the item's origin, date of production, who bought the item and when, among other information. RFID tags can even be used after the sale to ensure that consumers actually bought items that they are attempting to return or have serviced.

Privacy advocates are concerned that RFID tags attached to products like clothing could remain functional after the products have been purchased and taken home and thus could be used for surveillance and other purposes unrelated to the supply chain inventory functions (e.g. to monitor consumer shopping habits).

Would-be identity thieves can purchase an inexpensive electronic skimming device over the Internet and use it to capture and store information from your RFID-enabled cards. For example, your credit card information including your name, card number and expiration date can be read from as far away as 30 feet.

Does any legislation govern the use of RFID tags and information stored on them?

Though there is no federal or Massachusetts legislation specifically covering RFID, other laws covering the privacy of data would apply to RFID tags.

How Can You Protect Yourself?

Leave your RFID credit cards at home. Pay for purchases outside your home with cash or regular credit cards.

Stack your RFID credit cards together in your wallet. Putting your cards next to one another will make it harder for a scanner to read the data on a particular RFID card.

According to websites like Real Tech News and eHow.com, wrapping your RFID-embedded cards in aluminum foil can substantially hinder RFID scanners from reading the cards, but cannot completely block the signal.

For more advanced protection, you can purchase protective sleeves, wallets and/or cases, which will prevent RFID scanners from reading the data on your cards.

You should monitor your credit card statements each month for errors or odd charges.