

Radio Chips

Radio chips in every consumer product? The New York Times reported on current implementations of this technology. From the minute a product is manufactured to the minute a consumer buys it, corporations will be able to track it. Each product will be imbedded with a tiny chip, allowing continuous monitoring by the factory, truck, or outlet store housing the product. While the idea has many benefits, it also poses some very significant and somewhat alarming questions. If tagging a consumer product has become so trivial, how long before people can indiscreetly tag one another? How long before chips can store credit card information that can be hacked into by thieves? As microscopic radio chips become more and more prevalent, people will have to start dealing with privacy and confidentiality.

Currently, tiny radio chip monitors have been implemented in retail stores like The Gap. They are used to effectively monitor inventory levels and protect against shoplifters. According to recent trials, these chips are proving to be quite effective in both areas. In most stores, 15 percent of shoppers leave without getting what they wanted. With the implementation of these chips, store managers have been able to quickly reorder hot items. As a result, 15 percent of inventory loss has dropped to less than 1 percent.

Inventory loss has also been averted. According to The New York Times, retailers lost a staggering \$31.3 billion last year in misplaced inventory. Theoretically, the ability to automatically track one's inventory will greatly cut down on these losses. In the limited trials, the chips seem to remedy this problem.

While the benefits of these chips seem to be the panacea for the retail sector, they introduce a new set of problems. The ability to indiscreetly transmit information makes these chips susceptible to misuse. They can gather credit card information and transmit the identity of the buyer to the manufacturer. In doing so, they can potentially create security problems involving credit cards and other sensitive information.

Another potential problem deals with the tagging of actual people. If this radio chip technology becomes prevalent, companies and government agencies can effectively and indiscreetly tag any person they choose. This would greatly impede on a person's freedom, because they could be continuously monitored. It is therefore, the responsibility of the public to be skeptical and weary of such technologies. We should all be aware of the potential pitfalls associated with this new technology, so that we can better protect ourselves from it.