

TECHNOLOGY IN OUR LIVES

How RFID Technology Can Help You

(NAPSA)—A technology that's been around for decades is making shopping more convenient, driving more efficient and problem products easier to track. It's called radio frequency identification, or RFID, and it's finding more and more uses in today's world.

RFID is a wireless technology that's used to identify things. It's been used for more than 60 years, mainly to track products as they travel from manufacturers to distributors to retailers. Today, however, consumers are encountering this technology in many forms, and the National Consumers League, the nation's oldest consumer advocacy organization, says that it's important to understand 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. Information is programmed on the chip and sent to the reader by radio signals. The reader translates those signals and delivers the information to the computer system. One real-life example is the device on key chains that people can use to pay for gas by simply waving them in front of the pump. The chips in those devices contain information that is sent to the computer system, which identifies the account and amount to be billed for the purchase.

Some RFID systems use the EPC—Electronic Product Code—a unique code number that identifies a specific item. The EPC can help keep popular products from running out by helping retailers



A half-century-old inventory control technology is finding an increasing number of uses in today's world.

track inventory and reorder supplies more quickly.

RFID tags containing the EPC can be used to protect the public health. For example, tagging prescription drug bottles with the EPC at the manufacturer can help pharmacies make sure that the drugs they provide to consumers are genuine, not counterfeit. Stores can use the tags to locate recalled products or perishable items past their prime that should be removed from their shelves. The EPC can also help track the source of an item—such as a bag of spinach or beef from a cow, in case of disease.

To learn more about the different types of RFID technology and what they mean for consumers, go to www.nclnet.org/rfid.