**Use of RFID Tech at Border Crossings Raises Hacking Fears**

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One might think anything that promised to shorten the lengthy wait time at some U.S. border crossings would be welcomed by travelers, but the wireless technology that can read data on personal documents is causing some jitters. Privacy advocates worry that hackers might easily be able to steal information, but the government maintains aluminum document sleeves will thwart them.

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New technology at the busiest border crossing in the U.S. can read chip-enabled travel documents up to 30 feet from an inspection booth, promising shorter waits but raising concerns about targeting by computer hackers.

San Diego's San Ysidro border crossing is a key test for the devices, known as "radio frequency identification readers," because the facility is used by about 150,000 people daily.

It's the 13th land crossing to get the technology in recent months, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection plans to have it in place by June at the 39 busiest crossings with Mexico and Canada.

The chips already are contained in about 40,000 drivers licenses in two Canadian border states -- 32,000 in Washington and 7,700 in New York.

Arizona, Michigan and Vermont begin issuing the enhanced drivers licenses this year.

**Every Second Counts**

In unveiling the technology in San Diego on Thursday, U.S. authorities said it will shave six to eight seconds off each inspection because information will appear on an officer's computer screen before a motorist even arrives at the booth.

That would be a welcome development at the 24-lane San Ysidro crossing, where waits exceed three hours in Tijuana, Mexico, during peak times.

"If you save a few seconds, you will reduce the [waiting time] enormously," Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Ralph Basham said at the San Ysidro crossing, where motorists flashed documents out their windows as they reached the front of the line.

However, some privacy advocates said the document readers lack safeguards, referring to a hacker who reported lifting information from travel documents in the streets of San Francisco with the aid of a US$250 gadget.

"Someone with a fairly low-tech device, using off-the-shelf technology from some place like RadioShack, can snag [your information] out of the air," said Brock Meeks, spokesperson for the [Center for Democracy and Technology](http://www.cdt.org) [More about Center for Democracy and Technology](http://www.technewsworld.com/perl/search.pl?query=%22Center%20for%20Democracy%20and%20Technology%22&scope=network)in Washington.

**Hacker-Proof Sleeves**

Paul Henning, a Customs and Border Protection official in San Diego, said an aluminum storage sleeve prevents people from stealing information. Travelers pull the document from the sleeve -- one is provided by the government -- when they cross the border.

Henning said successful hackers would only be able to lift an identification number -- not personal information like name and address.

Despite the promises of speedier crossings, El Paso, Texas, immigration attorney Kathleen Walker said she hasn't noticed significant improvement since the technology was installed in the Texas border city.

The document readers might help, she said, but the only way to achieve shorter lines is adding more inspectors and vehicle lanes.

"Let's not read this is as the Second Coming," she said. http://www.ectnews.com/images/end-enn.gif

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