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MIT, HID Team up to Address RFID Privacy Concerns

Joint effort from academic, private sector seeks to dispel myths and fears of RFID
GEOFF KOHL, EDITOR
SecurityInfoWatch.com
Updated: 02-6-2009 12:22 pm

At a press conference held during ISC West, HID and MIT announced a joint industry and private sector program designed to keep information about RFID available to the public.

The effort to address the issues of privacy and RFID is primarily being addressed through an MIT website -- rfidprivacy.mit.edu/access (http://rfidprivacy.mit.edu/access)). The "RFID and Privacy" website and the program are being spearheaded by HID's Director of Government Affairs Kathleen Carroll and Dan Greenwood, an attorney and MIT lecturer who has been following anti-RFID legislation and issues in the general populace.

According to Greenwood, the key component of the initiative is to educate the public by teaching what RFID is, how it can be used and why it's an important business and security tool. The site helps concerned citizens and legislators stay up-to-date on news in the world of RFID, and shows research and case studies that demonstrate the benefits of RFID, rather than the feared downsides.

"We think you can have a world where you can have it all," said Greenwood. "It's not always true that if you have more technology, you'll have less privacy."

The impetus behind the RFID education portal stems largely from industry concern over public outcry about RFID, and from concerns about pending RFID legislation.

According to Carroll, about a dozen states currently have RFID legislation on the table, and five of those – Alabama, California, New Hampshire, Illinois and Rhode Island – have wording in the proposed legislation that would specifically affect RFID usage for personal identification technologies. The other states' legislation largely focuses on RFID usage in consumer environments such as retail asset tracking.

But as Greenwood and Carroll note, the fears about RFID are largely unfounded and stem from a misunderstanding about a new technology. Of course, with any luck, this MIT/HID education initiative may just be able to dispel those fears before consumer-driven legislation cripples an industry -- an industry which many would argue is developing technologies to protect privacy, not diminish it.

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