

**Office of Intellectual Freedom’s Proposed Guidelines for RFID  
Item # 14**

**YALSA Board of Directors Meeting  
ALA Midwinter Meeting, San Antonio  
January 20-25, 2006**

**Topic:** Office of Intellectual Freedom’s Proposed Guidelines for RFID

**Background:** The OIF has been working on guidelines for RFID in libraries and are looking for feedback from ALA members and units. There will be an open meeting on Saturday, January 21, 1:30–3:30 p.m., at the 2006 Midwinter Meeting for anyone wishing to give comment.

**Action Required:** Consent/Information Only

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**Guidelines for Implementing RFID Technologies in Libraries:  
Privacy and Intellectual Freedom Concerns**

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is a method to collect, use, store, and broadcast data. Components include tags, readers, computer hardware (such as servers and security gates) and RFID-specific software.

When used in libraries, this technology enables efficient and ergonomic inventory and circulation operations.

Protecting user privacy and confidentiality has long been an integral part of the mission of libraries. The right to free inquiry as assured by the First Amendment depends upon the right and the ability to read and access information anonymously, free from scrutiny. Librarians have an ethical obligation to preserve the library user's right to privacy in the library, and to prevent any unauthorized use of the library user's personal information.

### **Policy Issues for Libraries Implementing RFID Technologies**

Libraries implementing RFID technologies should adopt and update appropriate policies and procedures in order to protect library users' privacy, in compliance with Article III of the ALA Code of Ethics<sup>3</sup> and *Privacy: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*<sup>4</sup>. Such policies should be transparent about the library's use of RFID technologies. The *Guidelines for Creating a Privacy Policy*<sup>5</sup> can assist libraries in drafting appropriate policies.

Notice and information about the library's use of RFID technologies should be posted prominently and made widely available to the public, both within the library and through the library's print and online communications.

Libraries should educate and inform library users concerning RFID technology and its current and future use in the library and in society as a whole in order to give users a larger voice in the public debate over RFID technology.

Libraries should disclose any changes in their privacy policies or in their terms of use for patron data that result from the adoption of an RFID system.

In relation to their use of RFID technologies, libraries should recognize their institutional obligations with respect to notice, access, use, disclosure, retention, enforcement, security, and disposal of records.

Libraries should not use RFID systems to track individual library users. Libraries should remove any personally identifiable information from statistical data collected by RFID systems.

Libraries should train staff to protect user privacy in conjunction with the implementation and use of RFID technologies.

### **Technology Issues for Libraries Implementing RFID Technologies**

Libraries should affirm and reinforce their obligation to secure their bibliographic and patron database from unauthorized entry.

Libraries should protect their RFID databases in the same way that they ensure the security of the circulation and other functions of integrated library systems (ILS).

Due to the potential for eavesdropping, libraries should use hardwire connections and not wireless connections for all communications between RFID systems and the ILS involving personally identifiable information.

Libraries should encrypt information stored on RFID tags.

Libraries should limit the information stored on the tag to the item's barcode.

Libraries should refrain from storing personally identifiable information (PII) on RFID tags or RFID-enabled patron cards.

Libraries utilizing “smart cards” should use an “opt-in” system that allows library user to choose between “smart cards” and barcode-enabled cards in order to accommodate users who do not wish to utilize or carry an RFID-enabled device.

(Technology to accommodate a hybrid card system is available from vendors without significant additional expense.)

Libraries should clearly identify all of their RFID readers so that users know they are in use.

Libraries should not grant individuals the ability to search the library's catalog by barcode number, in order to avoid linking a specific information item to a specific user. In addition, staff should be trained to not release information about the barcode in response to blind or casual inquiries.

### **Vendor Issues for RFID Technologies**

Librarians should be aware that independent researchers have concluded that current RFID technology cannot preserve user privacy in the library.<sup>6</sup> RFID is a technology with evolving standards and while encryption technology to enhance user security is under development, it is not widely available.

The agreement between the library and the vendor should stipulate how the system will secure all information and guarantee library control of all data. Assurances of library users' privacy by vendors should be closely investigated. Libraries should evaluate the vendor's agreement in relationship with all library privacy policies and local, state, and Federal laws.

Libraries should work to influence the development of RFID technologies by issuing Requests for Proposals to vendors that require the use of security technologies that preserve privacy and discourage monitoring.

Librarians should educate themselves about RFID technologies and their associated industries, and continue to monitor news and reports concerning changes in the technologies and any new information concerning the privacy and health of library

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