

# Chipping away at personal freedoms

by David Salcido

**T**here's no doubt about it, our world is changing at light speed. What was considered science fiction just ten years ago, is rapidly becoming the wave of the future. But is that necessarily a good thing? We'd all be fools to believe so. Because, no matter what the talking heads at Fox News have to say on the subject, the government does not always have our best interests in mind. They do, however, have their fingers in the proverbial pie. Take for instance that insidious little device called the RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) chip, which was causing all the uproar a couple years back. Think you've heard the last of it? Think again.

To being with, if the FDA had already approved the VeriChip in late 2004--which when implanted under a person's skin was only supposed to provide vital information about that person's medical history to doctors and hospitals--why was it necessary for the government to include chipping in its Real ID Act of 2005? That long-winded act of the United States Congress, entitled Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, The Global War on Terror and Tsunami Relief, 2005 was introduced as an attempt to "deter terrorism," but was, in fact, yet another thinly-veiled way of limiting our personal freedoms. You know, to protect us. If the VeriChip was so innocuous, why make it part of a government mandate to deter terrorism? Good question. Keep it in mind, because it hasn't gone away.

Oh, sure, the debate raged for a while, with people weighing in on both sides, before finally dropping to a low grumble. Some condoned the RFID devices as a necessary evil, particularly when it came to merchandising and theft prevention. Others saw a bigger picture in which those very same devices, which are even now being hidden in products purchased at your local Wal-Mart or Target, can also be used to track where and how you use the products. In early 2006 the Bush administration issued a mandate that all passports would be outfitted with RFID chips. More issues of privacy concerns arose and alternative press journals like Wired magazine began publishing stories about how to disable the chips. Still, for the most part, we, the people, went along with it.



When it came to that old bugaboo about chipping people, however, the debate got ugly, with news stories on the major networks and respected journalists weighing in on the matter. So heated was the debate that, in May of 2006, Wisconsin became the first state to approve a law making it a crime to require an individual to be implanted with a microchip. Other states, including Ohio, Colorado, North Dakota and Oklahoma have since introduced similar legislation. Always vigilant in discovering new ways to get around a roadblock, technologists set to work looking for an alternative. They've found it, for the time being, but the spectre of human chipping continues to haunt us.

Earlier this year, Hitachi introduced their "powder type" chips, which are so small they can be incorporated into thin paper, like currency or gift certificates. Sounds innocuous until you hear the other projected uses of this new microchip. For example, suppose you participated in some sort of protest or other organized activity. If police agencies sprinkled these tags around, every individual could be tracked and later identified at leisure, with powerful enough tag scanners. Shades of George Orwell's 1984 come to mind, don't they?

So, why am I opposed to this seeming inevitability? The implications of a "powder chip" aside, quite frankly, I don't like the idea that who I am can be summed up within a few seconds by complete strangers who, I feel, do not have my best interests

in mind. As an American citizen, I pride myself on my ability to think for myself, to research those ideas I find interesting, to discover what few truths I can and to make my own decisions based on same. If I don't agree, I believe I have the right to protest. It's in the Constitution, though how long that will matter remains to be seen.

Do I really want a chip implanted in my body which, in the event that I say or do something that those in power find offensive or "unpatriotic," can simply be switched off, thus depriving me of my identification, my access to credit, my ability to survive within our consumerist society? There have been science fiction stories written about such things for decades. Becoming a non-person within a controlled society is easily equated to invisibility and eventually death. Unless I'm planning on living in a teepee in New Mexico, growing my own food, drilling for my own water, and typing out my diatribes on an old fashioned typewriter, the chances of my survival would be questionable.

I'll tell you what. I'll consider getting a VeriChip, the day that George W. Bush, Donald Trump and every living member of the Rockefeller family has one implanted. And only if all information gleaned from these devious little devices becomes public knowledge, much like traffic tickets and divorce proceedings. Personally I don't believe that day will ever come about, but I do believe that it's only a matter of time before the mandate is put into effect for we, the people. And on that day, the teepee is going to look pretty damned good. Think about it.

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