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## Electronic Passports?

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By Robert Hernandez  
Aug 14, 2006

Electronic passports are set for roll out today for the US. The lede in the story from the Associated Press hints that many will be hesitant to have their personal information on a chip in an electronic passport.

AP reports that despite ongoing privacy concerns and legal disputes involving companies bidding on the project, the U.S. State Department plans to begin issuing smart chip-embedded passports to Americans as planned Monday.

Believe me - that's many of concerns I hear when I quiz my fellow travelers.

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There are already reports that a German computer security specialist has warned that the new electronic passports that are now being planned in the United States and other countries are vulnerable to hacking and criminals can copy the embedded secret codes and enter a country illegally.

Earthtimes reports that Lukas Grunwald, a security consultant with DN Systems in Germany, held a demonstration to show how personal information contained in electronic documents can be easily copied and transferred into another device.

He said the whole passport design is brain-damaged and they are not increasing security at all. "If there is an automatic inspection system, I can use this card to enter any country," he said showing a computer chip, which contained electronic information he said he copied from a German passport.

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AP notes that contradicts assurances by officials in government and private industry that the electronic information stored in passports could not be duplicated.

It seems a bit stunning that after last week's liquid bomb plot that this would still go forward. Any problems will result in even longer delays in line at the airport and if the chips aren't hack-proof this could cause a major uproar.

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The State Department argues that they will speed up going through customs and help enhance border security.

As far as your identity being stolen "It's no different than someone stealing your passport and trying to use it," Randy Vanderhoof, executive director of the Smart Card Alliance, a New Jersey-based not-for-profit made up of government agencies and industry players, said in a statement.

"No one else can use it because your photo is on the chip and they're not you."

That will do little to ease concerns among privacy advocates and if it causes problems, frequent flyers - which are already a bit frustrated - won't be pleased either.

-- **Robert Hernandez is a frequent flyer that writes from Florida**

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