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REGION: New Electronic Passports Vulnerable To Criminal Hackers**Tuesday: August 8, 2006**

(*Tahitipresse*) - A computer security expert has demonstrated how new hi-tech biometric passports being introduced by several countries could allow criminals to clone the embedded secret code and enter countries illegally.

Lukas Grunwald, a German expert, demonstrated Friday at the Defcon security conference in Las Vegas how information stored in the new passports can be transferred onto blank chips that could then be implanted in fake passports, the British newspaper *The Guardian* reported on its Internet Web site Sunday. A similar article by *The Associated Press* was published on the ABC News Web site Sunday.

The AP article noted that Grunwald's warning "appeared to contradict assurances by officials in (the U.S.) government and private industry that the electronic information stored in passports could not be duplicated".

"If there is an automatic inspection system, I can use this card to enter any country," Grunwald said, holding up a computer chip containing electronic information he had copied from his German passport, *The AP* reported.

The Guardian quoted Grunwald telling *Wired.com*, "The whole passport design is totally brain damaged. From my point of view all of these (biometric) passports are a huge waste of money—they're not increasing security at all."

According to *The Guardian*, "since March anyone applying for a UK passport has been issued with a biometric version, which contains physical identification information."

The AP reported that a U.S. State Department spokesperson said late Saturday she did not have enough information to comment.

According to *The Guardian*, the potential passport hacking principle may apply to any new passport issued in Britain, the U.S.A. and other countries.

"But the findings do not mean that all biometric information could be faked or altered by criminals. Although the data held on a passport chip is not encrypted, it is not yet possible to change the cloned data without alerting the authorities," *The Guardian* reported.

The AP reported that Grunwald "is the latest to raise concerns

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about the growing use of RFID, short for radio-frequency identification, which allows everyday objects such as . . . security documents to beam electronic data to computers equipped with special antennas".

Germany is one of several countries that already use RFID in passports to help immigration officials guard against forgeries and automate the processing of international visitors, The AP reported. "U.S. officials plan to start embedding RFID in passports in October."

Source:

<http://www.tahitipresse.pf/index.cfm?snave=see&presse=16777?=2>

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