

### **News Update Service**

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Sci. & Tech.

# Hacker gets into biometric passport data

By Bobbie Johnson

London, Aug. 8 (Guardian News Service): Hi-tech biometric passports used by many countries have been hacked by a computer expert, throwing into doubt fundamental parts of the UKgovernment's GBP415m scheme to load passports with information such asfingerprints, facial scans and iris patterns. Speaking at the Defcon security conference in Las Vegas, Lukas Grunwald, a consultant with a German security company, said he had discovered amethod for cloning the information stored in the new passports. Data can betransferred on to blank chips, which could then be implanted in fakepassports, a flaw which he said undermined the project.

The revelation also casts another shadow over the UK government's planfor a national ID card, which would contain much of the same information.

``The whole passport design is totally brain damaged," Mr Grunwald toldWired.com. ``From my point of view all of these [biometric] passports are ahuge waste of money - they're not increasing security at all." Since Marchanyone applying for a UK passport has been issued with a biometric version, which contains physical identification information.

Mr Grunwald said his discovery was made within two weeks of firstattempting to copy the data, and the equipment used cost \$200. It is believed the hacking principle could be applied to any new passport issuedin Britain, the US and other countries. But the findings do not mean thatall biometric information could be faked or altered by criminals. Althoughthe data held on a passport chip is not encrypted, it is not yet possible to change the cloned data without alerting the authorities.

The Home Office in London said yesterday(AUG6) that the UK biometricpassport was one of the most secure in the world and, while it might bepossible to copy the chip data, it was not possible to modify or manipulateany of the data. Last week the House of Commons' science and technologycommittee called on the government to reconsider the technology behindbiometric ID schemes.

Sci. & Tech.

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