

Landmark EPAL scheme paves way for supply chain roll out

The European Pallet Association (EPAL) has completed the first phase of a revolutionary new initiative that allows EURO pallets to be uniquely identified.

The pilot scheme for the use of Radio Frequency identification (RFID) tags in standard EPAL wooden pallets (EURO pallets) was carried out with GS1 in Europe, a collaboration of 44 European GS1 member organisations. It set out to develop a business plan for using the technology in standard EPAL wooden pallets (EURO pallets) and the technological and organisational requirements for full roll out.

EPAL has recognised significant benefits in implementing RFID/EPC technology to identify its pallets, which include improved supply chain efficiency, asset visibility and pallet security. Following the completion of the RFID/EPC pilot, which involved all GS1 EPCglobal standards, EPAL believes there are opportunities to improve the control of production and repair of EURO pallets, authenticate individual pallets, and reduce the number of counterfeit pallets. It is also looking at streamlining the administration and information exchange of users within the EPAL system, a cross sector open pallet exchange pool.

Harry Jacobi, CEO of EPAL, said: "We are very satisfied with the results of the pilot programme. The EPC/RFID technology, the tag concept and the IT infrastructure have been approved and are seen as a very good solution for EPAL. The second phase of the project will answer all the remaining questions and help us to prepare a rollout."

"The results of the EPAL EPC/RFID pilot program are very promising and we look forward to the pre-rollout phase. Nevertheless, there are still open issues to solve such as the number of tags fixed on a pallet for optimal reading, the data stored on the tag, the handling of the GS1 Serial Shipping Container Code (SSCC) and others which need to be solved within the next 6 months in order to enable a full rollout," said Stephane Pique, European Director of GS1 in Europe. "There is a need to align our work with other pallet pools to create a standard that is beneficial to all pallet users. To address this issue a specific EPCglobal interest group has been launched."



There are currently over 500 million wooden EURO pallets in circulation, which are standardised and certified by EPAL. Under the pallet association's control and licence, more than 60 million new pallets a year are produced in 30 countries with over 1,000 repair centres worldwide.

A second phase and pre-rollout of the pilot program will take place in 2009. The pilot will involve additional countries and will focus on the RFID tag requirements and the development of a more detailed concept addressing process, IT and RFID infrastructure for implementation.

Pilot partners:

The partners participating in the EPAL pilot program included EPAL, GS1 in Europe, Swisscom, Oracle, Labelform and Holliger Pallet Logistics in Switzerland where the pallets were EPC/RFID tagged. GS1 member organisations from Switzerland, Germany and France have supported EPAL with the definition, conception and the static and dynamic testing of the EPC tags within the EECC lab.

About EPAL and UIC

EPAL the European Pallet Association is a not-for profit organisation, which was founded in 1991 to work with UIC (the International Railway Association) to maintain a quality assurance and inspection standard for the pallet, which is also known as the 'Europe' pallet. The objective is to provide an exchangeable EUR pool pallet of sufficient quality with uniform exchange criteria for the supply chain. The association is active in Europe, USA, China, India and Australia with different types of pallets.

About EPCglobal Inc

EPCglobal is a subsidiary of the global not-for-profit standards organisation GS1 and supports the global adoption of the Electronic Product Code as industry-driven standards to enable accurate, immediate and cost-effective visibility of information throughout the supply chain. www.epcglobalinc.org / www.gs1eu.org

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For more information about this press release, contact Jenny Peacock on 01480 465953 or email jenny@redcomm.co.uk,
RED Communications, 3-4 Free Church Passage, St Ives, Cambridgeshire PE 27 5AY

For colour separations: Fax 01480 466 524