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VeriChip Wants To Test Human Implantable RFID On Military

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VeriChip is pitching its human implantable [RFID](#) chips to the U.S. military.

[VeriChip](#) spokesperson Nicole Philbin confirmed Wednesday that the company's Board Chairman Scott Silverman has held informal meetings with U.S. Navy and Air Force leaders to suggest a feasibility study of its [VeriMed](#) system.

The system relies on an implant the size of a grain of rice, which [VeriChip](#) claims has an encrypted 16-digit identification number. Philbin said only proprietary RFID readers can decipher the number, which is then entered into a [secure database](#). A [login](#) name and [password](#) are required to access the [database](#) on a secure Web site, Philbin said, adding that the system is more secure and more effective than things people normally carry in their wallets.

Like overall participation, the amount of information attached to the identification number is at the discretion of individuals who volunteer for the program, Philbin said. That could be limited to the most basic information, like name and telephone number, or it could contain advance directives, organ donor status and more.

VeriChip is owned by [Applied Digital](#), which lists federal agencies among its clients. The company markets the VeriMed system as a way to ensure that emergency responders and healthcare providers can identify a patient who is or unable to communicate and learn of allergies and medical conditions.

"The Department of Defense already has an electronic health records program, and VeriChip would like to enhance the quality of care for vets and military members," Philbin said. "There is no power source. It can't be tracked. It's not a [GPS](#) device. It contains no information other than the identification number. It's not mandatory. If a person with the device is presented to an emergency room unconscious, they may be allergic to something or have a preexisting condition, and that information is crucial."

The RFID implants were approved as Class II medical devices by the U.S. Food and Drug

Administration in October 2004. In a letter, Donna-Bea Tillman, PhD, director of the F.D.A.'s Office of Device Evaluation, Center for Devices and Radiological Health, outlined potential health risks associated with [VeriChip implants](#). They include adverse tissue reaction; migration of implanted transponder; compromised information security; failure of implanted transponder, inserter or electronic scanner; electromagnetic interference; electrical hazards; magnetic resonance imaging incompatibility; and needle stick.

"With any F.D.A. approval, they state the potential risks," Philbin said. "The F.D.A. is satisfied with the product and that's why they have given it the O.K."

Some people have [implanted](#) chips in themselves to experiment with the technology and for fast access to their computer accounts.

Critics contend that VeriChip is peddling its products to governments, while targeting vulnerable populations " like the [elderly](#), inmates, [immigrants](#) and members of the military, who have less choice than the general population. They claim that RFID proponents' eventual goal is to "chip" as many people as possible, then track consumers and their behaviors for marketing purposes.

The [Electronic Privacy Information Center](#) states that "the ability to track people, products, vehicles, and even currency would create an Orwellian world where law enforcement officials and nosy retailers could read the contents of a handbag—perhaps without a person's knowledge—simply by installing RFID readers nearby."

"Such a fear is not unfounded. Currently, some RFID readers have the capacity to read data transmitted by many different RFID tags," the organization states on its Web site. "This means that if a person enters a store carrying several RFID tags—for example, in articles of clothing or cards carried in a wallet—one RFID reader can read the [data](#) emitted by all of the tags, and not simply the signal relayed by in-store products. This capacity enables retailers with RFID readers to compile a more complete profile of shoppers than would be possible by simply scanning the bar codes of products a consumer purchases."

Some people have claimed to clone [implants](#), saying that demonstrates how vulnerable they are, but Philbin said they are impossible to clone.

"The company can't verify what hackers claim they can or cannot do," she said.

Joe Davis, spokesperson for the Veterans of Foreign Wars office in Washington, D.C., said although it makes great sense to be able to scan a device and pull up a full medical history, he would like to see further study before the military uses the implants. He said his initial concerns include possible health effects, whether enemies could access soldiers' information and whether the implants would replace dog tags, and, if so, stand up to an explosion.

"They issue two dog tags," he said. "One goes around the neck and the other is laced into the boot. The foot and boot will survive an explosion. DNA from the foot in the boot will survive, plus you've got your metal dog tag right there. What type of survival rate does this little [chip](#) have in an explosion? From what I've read, it sounds like they're trying to push this thing through. You don't push things through when it's new technology. You have to weigh all the pros and cons, and you have to ask the service members 'What do you think of this?' because it's going in their neck, or wherever it's going to go, and this proposal needs lot more study."

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