

VeriChip Receives Patent for Asset Tracking with Active RFID

February 1, 2007

by Tim McGee

VeriChip Corporation has announced that it has obtained the patent for a portable RFID asset location system. The product combines RFID tagging technology along with a portable receiver that can enable the tracking of assets in a fixed setting like a warehouse or building.

The system will utilize portable receivers to collect RFID messages and identify the unique ID of an asset, as well as its room location. This will eliminate the installation costs of fixed receivers throughout a facility and could substantially lower the initial cost of implementing RFID technology.

Patent Number 7116230 describes the portable location system as:

- An asset location system comprising a plurality of location tags, each having:
- A location tag transmitter for controlled range transmission of a location identifier;
- A plurality of asset tags, each being affixed to an asset and each having: a receiver for receiving a location identifier from any of the location tags;
- A memory for storing at least an asset identifier and a location identifier;
- A transmitter for transmitting an asset signal, the asset signal including at least the asset identifier and the received location identifier;
- An asset location retrieval unit, the retrieval unit having: a receiver for receiving the asset signal from any of the asset tags; a memory; a power unit; and an output means for outputting asset locations based on the received asset signal from any of the plurality of asset tags.

At this time, VeriChip has not indicated when the Portable RFID Asset Tracking System will be available for purchase.

This should not impact most RFID asset tracking vendors since they use a fixed infrastructure. I'm aware of a few vendors who have systems based on carrying around a portable receiver, but they are not widely used.

I did learn about an asset tracking system based on a portable receiver just today, from a company called Aethon. They have an autonomous robot called Homer that moves throughout a facility determining the location of assets, thus obviating the need for a fixed RTLS infrastructure. When combined with their other autonomous robot, Tug, the Aethon system can reportedly find and retrieve assets automatically. Sounds pretty cool, but I can't imagine they'll be pleased to hear about VeriChip's new patent.