

POSTAL NEWS

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1. EU wants RFID chips for its postal services

Brussels wants RFID Frites

By Sylvie Barak: Thursday, 19 June 2008, 8:41 PM

THE EU MEMBER STATES often have a hard time agreeing on stuff, but one thing they are all unanimous about (yes, even Ireland) is the importance of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chips. Especially when it comes to the postal service.

By 2013 the EU will supposedly have a fully liberalised postal system, having hopefully abolished all the culturally charming yet archaic and inefficient national monopolies. This means the postal market will soon be overrun with companies promising to get your mail to its destination faster and for less stamp duty than ever. Which is nice, but mo' postal services, mo' problems, as they say, and mail could well end up getting very lost. This is where RFID comes into play.

RFID chips have already been tried and tested by postal service in about 50 countries worldwide and, surprise, surprise, have been found to work rather well. Akhilesh Mathur of the UN's Universal Postal Union (UPU), told Euractive that "as costs drop and tags become smaller, RFID could be used for item-level tracking".

If RFID tracking was actually deployed properly, it would probably mean mail would never get lost ever again, something which sounds far too efficient for EU standards, to be honest, but fingers crossed.

Of course, the idea would only really be plausible if the chips were cheap enough and small enough to make the idea practical in the first place. Apparently both Hitachi and Motorola are currently hard at work trying to cut the chips down to size. Some tech-sperts even believe that new development could lead to such miniscule sizes that the term "smart dust" would actually be more appropriate than "chips".

But of course another key factor in whether or not RFID could be used to better the efficiency of the postal service is interoperability, which by all measures, still seems a little way off. The European commission swears blue in the face that it'll have a global RFID standard ready by sometime in 2010, but that probably means 2013 at the earliest. But when it happens, boy are we in for a treat(y). μ

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Euractive

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2. 'Mailbox bombs' spur Postal Service to warn people of potential injury

By Eric Russell

Friday, June 20, 2008 - Bangor Daily News

This generation's equivalent of mailbox baseball has letter carriers across the country worried about the potential for much more serious consequences.

The United States Postal Service has sent out millions of postcards, including about 100,000 in Maine recently, warning people about soda bottles filled with volatile chemicals that are left in mailboxes. Usually, the plastic bottles build up pressure from the chemical reaction and explode, destroying the mailbox from the inside out. If someone happens to be near the mailbox at the time of the explosion, however, the damage may not be limited to property.

"We want to assure people that [the postcards] are not a response to any organized pattern, but we felt it would be a wise precaution to make customers aware that this is happening," Tom Rizzo, spokesman for the Maine district of the USPS, said Thursday. "All it would take is for someone to come upon it at the wrong time for something disastrous to happen."

Maine Public Safety spokesman Stephen McCausland said his office is aware of this "mailbox bomb" phenomenon, which he called a new version of "mailbox baseball," wherein a baseball bat was used to smash mailboxes.

The difference with the new version, he said, is that has the potential to harm.

"If these contraptions go off in close proximity, you can be seriously injured or even blinded," McCausland said. "We haven't had any serious injuries in Maine that I'm aware of, but I don't know if people are aware of the seriousness or not."

Maine has seen a handful of cases over the past few years, he said, although none has involved injuries. Each case is referred to the State Fire Marshal's Office for investigation.

In November 2006, two teenagers were charged with criminal use of explosives for setting off similar acid bombs inside a Skowhegan Wal-Mart just after Thanksgiving. Hundreds of customers were evacuated from the store, and a handful were treated for irritation to their eyes and throats or ringing in their ears. The two boys later made plea deals and agreed to spend 30 days in detention, serve 150 hours of community service and pay back \$5,000 in restitution for the damage.

"The thing about these devices is that they're easy to make with household ingredients that are readily available," McCausland said.

In New Jersey around this time last year, several makeshift mailbox bombs were found at residences in Ocean County. One man in Lacey Township, N.J., suffered burns to his face after a device exploded on his front steps, according to published reports.

The devices, sometimes known as "MacGyver" bombs after the popular 1980s TV character, are filled with chlorine and other chemicals. A chemical reaction inside the bottle creates pressure that causes the bottle to explode. Sometimes, they can detonate in seconds. Other times, it can take several minutes.

The trend has even made its way to YouTube, the online video-sharing site. A search of "mailbox bomb" yields dozens of files.

Even though the threat isn't imminent or widespread, the USPS said precaution is a good philosophy.

"These cases are rare, but they're real," Rizzo said. "It's worth our investment in getting the information out."

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3. Postal Service Hold Prices As Costs Climb

Wednesday, Jun 18, 2008 - 05:27 PM
By NBC 13 Staff

United States Postal Service spokespeople in Birmingham said Wednesday that fuel costs are eating up budgets at a record pace.

Nationally, the spokespeople said that for every one cent increase in gasoline's price there is an eight million dollar cost added to the postal service's annual budget.

Despite the record costs, the postal service plans no increase in prices, no fuel surcharges and will continue to deliver mail Monday through Saturday rather than park delivery trucks an extra day each week.

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4. Post Office blacklisted

June 18 2008 at 07:41AM

Rampant theft by Post Office workers has infuriated internet retailing giant Amazon so much that it will no longer send goods to South Africa by post, Business Day has reported.

Anyone wanting to order directly from the US-based website must now pay for a private courier service adding about R420 to the price of a DVD.

No one from the Post Office would comment.

No other African country's postal service had been blacklisted by Amazon, Business Day said. – Sapa

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5. Postal Bank widens insurance offerings

The Postal Bank will begin selling flight insurance in July.

Ron Stein and Eran Peer 18 Jun 08 16:34

Israel Postal Company Ltd. and Mizrach Insurance Agency are expanding their collaboration and plan to begin the sale of flight insurance through branches of the Postal Bank Ltd. in July. The two companies also plan to expand the sale of vehicle insurance from ten post offices to fifty within the coming weeks.

The Postal Company and Mizrach Insurance Agency launched their joint venture in the first quarter of 2008. The pilot program for the sale of vehicle insurance began at two Postal Bank branches and without an advertising campaign. Both companies say that the pilot has been a success. There are reportedly an average of 1,100 leads per month and the number of sales of insurance policies is much higher than predicted.

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6. Internet giant says SA postal theft a problem

2008/06/19

THE SA Post Office is trying to contact Internet retailer Amazon.com for details on why it offers limited shipping to South Africa after a report that this was due to theft.

“It was a surprise ... unexpected,” said Post Office spokesperson Lungile Lose on a report in Business Day that theft had made the retailer decide that deliveries to South Africa would have to be done by private courier at a cost of around R400.

“We will still want to speak to them so that we can pick up where the root is and we will take it up with the Universal Postal Union,” he said.

Items from Amazon passed through other international postal service providers from their depots around the world, so they would like to talk to Amazon.com about which part of the route was problematic.

“This is an important customer,” said Lose.

He said that for the period 2007/2008 there had been 1699 reports of mail theft and that there was a 99 percent success rate when pursuing these cases.

The Post Office had installed specialist technology, including cameras, at sorting centres and had established a crime and ethics line for postal workers to report any suspicious behaviour.

Further details from Amazon.com were not immediately available. — Sapa

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7. William and Mary School of Business Professor John Strong Named to National Academy of Sciences Study Commission on Postal Reforms

WILLIAMSBURG, Va., June 18, 2008 /PRNewswire-USNewswire via COMTEX/ --
--John Strong, CSX Professor of Finance, has been appointed to a National Academy of Sciences Study Commission to examine prospective changes to the United States Postal Service (USPS). The Commission will review the Postal Service's universal service obligation (USO: 109.14, +2.23, +2.08%) and the postal monopoly in the United States, including the monopoly on the delivery of mail and on access to mailboxes.

The service obligation currently is mandated by law and defines the minimum mail service to which each citizen is entitled, including: (1) access to retail services and delivery, (2) frequency of delivery, (3) quality of service, (4) affordability, and (5) range of mail products offered.

Because providing a minimum level of service to every citizen may not be profitable under certain conditions, a USO is generally financed by granting exclusive rights to the postal administration to provide selected services, i.e., a postal monopoly. Over the last ten years, many countries, mostly in Europe, have begun to reduce the postal monopoly while at the same time ensuring some minimum level of service for each citizen.

The Study Commission will analyze the changing postal environment and recommend potential changes to the universal service obligation and postal monopoly in the United States.

The study will focus on three broad topics: the historical perspective of the USO and the monopoly in the United States and how these aspects of the postal service have evolved over time to meet the country's needs; the social and economic impacts of potential changes in the USO/monopoly on particular population subgroups; and the societal impacts for the country as a whole of potential changes in the USO/monopoly.

Strong has had previous appointments to National Academy of Sciences committees on aviation and road safety topics.

The National Academy of Sciences was founded in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln. As part of the National Academies, the National Research Council's mission is to improve government decision making and public policy, increase public education and understanding, and promote the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge in matters involving science, engineering, technology, and health. The National Academies are intended to provide elected leaders, policy makers, and the public with expert advice based on sound scientific evidence. This advice is made possible by 6,000 of the world's top scientists, engineers, and other professionals who volunteer their time without compensation to serve on committees and participate in activities.

The [HYPERLINK "http://mason.wm.edu/"](http://mason.wm.edu/) Mason School of Business is an AACSB-accredited school of business. Students are immersed in real business situations throughout the undergraduate and graduate business education programs. [HYPERLINK "http://mason.wm.edu/Mason/Executive-Partners"](http://mason.wm.edu/Mason/Executive-Partners) Executive Partners, the school's pioneering model of faculty-executive partnership in and out of the classroom, Career Acceleration Modules, and [HYPERLINK "http://mason.wm.edu/Mason/Leadership-Advantage"](http://mason.wm.edu/Mason/Leadership-Advantage) Leadership Advantage combine to form a highly personalized, experience-based education that is unmatched by most business schools today. The school was named for William and Mary alumnus, Raymond A. "Chip" Mason in November 2005. It will move into its new state-of-art building, [HYPERLINK "http://mason.wm.edu/Mason/Our+School/Alan+B.+Miller+Hall/"](http://mason.wm.edu/Mason/Our+School/Alan+B.+Miller+Hall/) Alan B. Miller Hall, in fall 2009. Miller Hall was named for William and Mary alumnus, Alan B. Miller in March 2007.

The College of William and Mary, located in Williamsburg, VA, is one of the nation's premier state-assisted liberal arts universities and believes that excellence in teaching is the key to unlocking intellectual and personal possibilities for students. Dedicated to this philosophy and committed to limited enrollment, the College provides high-quality undergraduate, graduate and professional education that prepares students to make significant contributions to the Commonwealth of Virginia and the nation. As the second-oldest institution of higher learning in the United States and educational home to many early American leaders, The College is revered as the "alma mater of a nation."

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8. New Scottish Postal Operator

19 June 2008 by David Lynch - © Hellmail.co.uk

Postcomm today began a 30-day consultation on the proposed grant of another postal operator's licence - this time to a Mr Wesley Pollock, trading as Scotpost.

The licence would allow Scotpost to provide all types of postal service, issued for a rolling ten year period, requiring Scotpost to comply with codes of practice on mail integrity (safety and security of the mail) and common operational procedures (designed to ensure the multi-operator market works well in practice).

The consultation notice and proposed licence can be found on the Scotpost consultation page on the Postcomm web site. Printed copies are available from Postcomm at Hercules House, 6 Hercules Road, London, SE1 7DB. The closing date for responses is 19 July 2008.

Postcomm said it was minded, subject to consultation, to grant a licence to Mr Pollock. It said that the proposed licence would further the interests of postal users by promoting competition between postal operators and that it would have no adverse effect on the provision of a universal postal service in the United Kingdom.

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9. Brownies visit BSB Postal Dept

By Mohammad Abdullah

Brownies at the post office in Bandar Seri Begawan. - PHOTOS: MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH

Brownies showing off the Girl Guides' 40th anniversary first day cover and stamp.

Twenty little brownies paid a visit to the Bandar Seri Begawan Postal Service Department yesterday to learn more about the postal services, stamps and first day covers. They were accom-panied by eight teachers.

"As part of the camping programme, we have devised several activities for the brownies. Visiting the post office to get to know more about stamps and first day covers is one of the ways for the brownies to get involved in the activity which has been around for quite some time," said one of the teachers.

The brownies were given a tour of the post office as well as the stamp gallery where they were taught on the value of stamps as well as the official first day cover. They were also told of the existence of a stamp collection club, "SODAkids", which caters to children below the age of 18 years.

The brownies were also given a brief demonstration on how to take care of the stamps and first day covers.

The head of Philatelic Unit, Hjh Hammah, presented each of the brownies with a special official first day cover and stamp of the Girl Guides' 40th Anniversary.

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Collected by Chairul Anwar, Bandung, Indonesia.

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