



From the Standards Blog:

☐ ☐ March 20, 2004

#14 Dan Mullen, Andrew Jackson and the Dark Side of the Web There once was a time when running a standard setting organization was a pretty sedate and predictable way to make a living. You called meetings, you worked on keeping in touch with the members, and you made sure that the bills got paid. Sure, there were internal politics to deal with, and a bad economy would make you struggle to keep membership up, but those were small problems to face in exchange for a decent job and a pretty secure future.

But that, as the current saying goes, was then, and this is now. "Now" brings new demands on the director of a standards organization, like squelching Internet rumors about combustible RFID tags contaminating the money supply.

Come again?

Our story begins, allegedly, at www.savethemales.ca, the "The Home of Henry Makow Ph.D." according to its home page. Dr. Makow's site also states that it is dedicated to "Exposing Feminism and the New World Order". Articles listed in the "Best of Henry Makow" side bar have rather bewildering titles, such as "Communism: Wall Street's Utopian Hoax." Today, the lead article is entitled "Americans are Rothschild Proxies in Iraq". Obviously, such a site represents the type of reliable news portal to which one would give great credence.

Dr. Makow also has certain concerns regarding privacy, as in maintaining one's privacy from the watchful eyes of Big Brother. All of which quite naturally brings us to David and Denise.

D&D supposedly sent a letter to Dr. Makow (Ph.D.) indicating that Dave's wallet had set off the shoplifting monitor in the local truck stop. The problem seems to have arisen from the fact that Dan's wallet was stuffed with new \$20 bills. Ever on the alert for the perfidious actions of Big Government, D&D immediately suspected...*RFID tags!*

Yes, RFID tags -- those insidious New Age tools for tracking honest citizens. D&D knew that they had to get to the bottom of the situation. As Denise (who is fond of single quotation marks) reported ("sics" omitted, so as not to interrupt the flow of Denise's prose):

Dave and I have brainstormed the fact that most items can be 'microwaved' to fry the 'rfid' chip, thus elimination of tracking by our government. So we chose to 'microwave' our cash...

Sure enough, as indisputably proven by the pictures supplied by D&D, the right eye of Andrew Jackson on every new twenty 'exploded'. Denise reported that:

Now we have to take all of our bills to the bank and have them replaced, cause they are now all 'burnt.'

D&D have wisely decided to wrap all of their larger bills in aluminum foil from now on, to thwart future government efforts to track them.

Leaving aside for the time being whether tracking D&D (assuming they actually exist) might not be such a terrible idea, we now move to Alex Jones' PRISONPLANET.com, which "adapted" the D&D letter, reproduced the pictures, and included the following helpful note:

This article has been linked all over the Internet. We want to make it clear that \$20 bills will only 'pop' or 'explode' in certain microwaves. We've had E mails saying they do, they don't, 'you're all kooks' etc etc. What is confirmed is the public policy to embed US and European money with high tech tracking devices as part of the hulking surveillance society.

It is an interesting coincidence that Alex also finds single quotes to be a useful device to attractively set off common words.

A brief Google search does indeed confirm that the article -- Alex's, anyway -- has been linked all over the Internet. It also can lead one to interesting observations, such as the following, which appear at www.lucifer.com, unambiguously titled "\$20 RFID story is horseshit...":

JC Suez: The same thing happens if you take a stack of copy paper and microwave it. A central point in the stack heats and eventually ignites and burns up and down the stack from that point.

Alex sez: Also of interest...is that they say they are messing with the NEW twenties, but in fact those are the old ones. you can tell because the portrait of Jackson has the circle around it, which is absent in the new twenties.

Indeed. Now, one might assume that the nascent RFID industry might not be too concerned about the invidious news revealed by Dr. Makow (or Alex Jones, as the case may be) through the good offices of alert citizens Dave and Denise. But you would be wrong.

Simply ignoring vicious rumors about RFID tags is not what you would expect from the alert director of a standards organization that is promoting RFID technology. Why? Because you're not paid the big bucks to just sit around and let this type of thing get out of hand.

Of course, what you would do is put out a press release. After all, news organizations invariably give front page coverage to standard setting organization news. So that is exactly what AIM President Dan Mullen decided to do, after first confirming his facts. Thus it is that Mr. Mullen did what every other good 'Netizen had already done: he pulled out his wallet and tossed the contents into his microwave.

From the resulting press release (Mullen prefers double quotation marks):

Do \$20 bills explode when placed in a microwave oven? Do they contain hidden radio frequency identification (RFID) tags? Can the government track you through your cash?... In order to determine whether or not there was a security feature in the \$20 bill that would cause this phenomenon, AIM North America tested a new \$20 bill in a microwave oven. After 1 minute on high, the bill was barely warm. Next, an RFID tag of the type used by commercial laundries was placed adjacent to Andrew Jackson's portrait on a new \$20 bill and again placed in the microwave oven. After only 2 seconds, the antenna and chip on the RFID tag began to "fry." After 20 seconds, the destruction of the RFID tag did set the bill on fire. The area around Andrew Jackson's right eye, where the "covert" tag is supposed to be hidden, was entirely unaffected. The attached scans are of the \$20 bill that was tested. The burned area to the right of the portrait is what remains of the laundry tag.

All this sounds well and good. However, on closer review of the press release, we noted that *no "scans" were actually attached to it!*

We knew what Dr. Makow would do, so we immediately dialed up Mr. Mullen. Tellingly, *no one answered the phone!* Apologists will, of course, quibble by noting that today is a Saturday. I expect that Henry

Makow, Ph.D. would know better. So we checked the AIM website, to find a link to the press release that we had earlier received, addressed to "press@aimglobal.org." *It wasn't there!*

Unnerved by this strange descent into the dark side of the Web, conspiracy theories and phantom press releases, we closed our browser down.

And there the matter stands, at least for now. Having no \$20 bills in my pocket, this journalist is unable to confirm or deny the real or imagined presence of RFID tags in \$20 bills (either new or old). And so, in the modern Fox News fashion, I can only conclude this entry with the simple question:

RFID Tags in \$20 bills: Big Brother Plot or Horseshit?

... You Decide!

Comments? updegrove@consortiuminfo.org

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Useful Links and Information:

Well, usually they're useful. ConsortiumInfo.org does not endorse external sites, and especially not the ones that follow:

The strange world of Dr. Henry Makow, Ph.D.
www.savethemales.ca

The equally strange world of Alex Jones:
www.prisonplanet.com

PrisonPlanet article on exploding Jackson's: <http://www.prisonplanet.com/022904rfidtagsexplode.html>

Lucifer.com is the site of Lucifer Media, and produces other sites with names like "Church of Virus," "Modern Fetish" and "Comatose Rose" ("an online and paper zine serving the Canadian goth-industrial-metal-experimental community")
www.lucifer.com

Text of AIM mystery press release:

Date: 16 March 2004
For more information, contact: Dan Mullen
President
AIM North America
dan@aimglobal.org

The Myth of the Amazing Exploding \$20 Bill

Do \$20 bills explode when placed in a microwave oven? Do they contain hidden radio frequency identification (RFID) tags? Can the government track you through your cash? One website recently published an "expose" about the supposed presence of an RFID chip placed behind Andrew Jackson's right eye on the new \$20 bill. This site claims that microwaving bills will cause the RFID tag to explode and burn the bill, thus exposing the "hidden" tag. Microwaving an RFID tag will cause it to create some spectacular sparks and will cause it to "pop." As a result, some people have begun wrapping their cash in aluminum foil to "foil" reading of the RFID tag.

In fact, placing a \$20 bill in a microwave oven does not cause it to explode, burn or affect it in any way. In order to determine whether or not there was a security feature in the \$20 bill that would cause this

phenomenon, AIM North America tested a new \$20 bill in a microwave oven. After 1 minute on high, the bill was barely warm. Next, an RFID tag of the type used by commercial laundries was placed adjacent to Andrew Jackson's portrait on a new \$20 bill and again placed in the microwave oven. After only 2 seconds, the antenna and chip on the RFID tag began to "fry." After 20 seconds, the destruction of the RFID tag did set the bill on fire. The area around Andrew Jackson's right eye, where the "covert" tag is supposed to be hidden, was entirely unaffected. The attached scans are of the \$20 bill that was tested. The burned area to the right of the portrait is what remains of the laundry tag.

Due to the power of the Internet, the source of the rumor (<http://www.prisonplanet.com/022904/rfidtagsexplode.html>) has been quoted internationally (at least one article based on this was published in Flemish on a Belgian web site). Even a casual examination of a \$20 bill will reveal that there is no hidden tag. Holding the bill up to a bright light would expose any RFID chip or antenna.

For reliable information on RFID, please visit www.rfid.org.

AIM's mission is to stimulate the understanding, adoption and use of technology by providing timely, unbiased and commercial-free news and information. For information about upcoming educational events, visit the AIM calendar at <http://www.aimglobal.org/calendar/>.

For more information, contact the AIM office at AIM Inc., 125 Warrendale-Bayne Rd., Suite 100, Warrendale, PA 15086, telephone +1-724-934-4470 or fax +1-724-934-4495. For direct online access to identification and mobility information or additional support, access the AIM Web site at ww.aimglobal.org or www.rfid.org.