Strahan Ted

From: Clarke Lenore
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2008 8:14 AM
To: Choy Edmund; Huynhtran Trucchi; Falat Ladislav; Hallock John; Humphrey V. Daniel; Cornell Dave; Curtis David; Strahan Ted
Subject: FW: tracking counterfeits

FYI

From: Daniel.A.Littman@clev.frb.org [mailto:Daniel.A.Littman@clev.frb.org]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2008 7:30 AM
To: Daniel.A.Littman@clev.frb.org
Subject: tracking counterfeits

Tracking counterfeits through laser printers

David Canton

http://lfpress.ca/newsstand/Business/Columnists/Canton_David/2008/03/31/5149061-sun.html

Though used for years, microscopic yellow tracking dots created by some colour laser printers have recently raised privacy concerns with the European Commission.

The European Commission is concerned printers that leave such a trail are breaking European laws. Franco Frattini, the EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security, said that "to the extent that individuals may be identified through material printed or copied using certain equipment; such processing may give rise to the violation of fundamental human rights, namely the right to privacy and private life. It might also be violating the right to protection of personal data."

Personal data is protected by the Data Protection Directive, but debate continues in Europe about how to define personal data. At times, it is uncertain what qualifies for protection.

Even if the information is not technically personal data, the tracking technology may still break the law. Article 7 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provides for the protection of private and family life, home and communication. Article 8 specifically protects personal data.

Printer makers are able to encode the serial number, manufacturing code and the date of printing through a series of small yellow dots interspersed on the printed paper. These dots are invisible to the naked eye.

This technology was developed nearly 20 years ago because laser-printing technology enabled counterfeiting. It was developed by printing companies in response to countries reluctance to sell laser printers without some means of tracing or tracking counterfeiters.

Recently, the Dutch railway police have been able to track counterfeits via printer serial numbers by tracking down the printer which was used to print fake tickets. A distributor in the Netherlands was visited by two police officers who knew the exact model of the printer used and hoped to learn the identity of the purchaser. As the company's records only revealed what batch the printer had arrived in,

the police left with specific sales information about the entire batch: about 100 printers in all.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation -- online at www.eff.org -- has much information about the issue of secret printer dots.

They note, for example, that Xerox has admitted it provided tracking dots to government. At present, only select enforcement agencies have the capacity to read the codes. Though the agencies insist they only use the information gleaned for criminal counterfeit investigations, there are no laws to stop government from abusing the information.

It is also estimated that researchers are able to identify the model of printer used to create documents in 11 out of 12 models tested. However, to prove that a specific printer was used by counterfeiters, authorities would need the printer in question to confirm suspicions.

Printer owners can easily test whether their laser printers are printing yellow tracking dots on their documents by flashing a blue LED light on white parts of their document. If numerous black dots appear (yellow becomes black under a blue LED light) with a semblance of structure, it is likely the document contains tracking dots.