

[CLICK HERE TO PRINT](#)[CLOSE WINDOW](#)

Times Online

August 07, 2006

## Cloning demo adds to fears over ID card scheme

BY PHILIPPE NAUGHTON

News that a German computer expert has managed to "clone" the data chip on his new passport has called into question government assurances about the security of the planned national ID card - which will use similar technology.

Lukas Grunwald gave a demonstration at a conference in Las Vegas last week to show that he could copy the information stored on the new passports, that have been issued in Britain since March.

Although Herr Grunwald was not able to modify any of the data on his own passport, he was able to insert the copied information on another chip that could be put into a forged passport or used to fool a card-reading machine.

Herr Grunwald told the **Wired.com** news website that it had taken him just two weeks to work out how to clone the radio frequency ID, or RFID, chips contained in his own German passport.

"The whole passport design is totally brain-damaged," he said. "From my point of view, all of these RFID passports are a huge waste of money. They're not increasing security at all."

The German's cloning exploit provides another argument for campaigners against the British ID cards, who argue that they will violate people's privacy, will be too expensive and are unnecessary.

They also back up the view of Dame Stella Rimington, the former MI5 director, who said last year that if the cards could be forged they would be "absolutely useless".

Phil Booth, national coordinator of the **No2ID** campaign, said that although Herr Grunwald had only been copying the data on his passport, still encrypted, a hacker in the Netherlands had managed to get readable data from another passport after "a couple of hours on a normal PC".

"As we understand it, the ID card will be a passport lite, for travel inside Europe, which means that they will have to use the same technology as in the passport on the cards, which begs the question - if they are already compromised why are we going down this line?" Mr Booth said.

"They're grabbing more and more of our data, saying it's secure but it's not. Any security expert will, tell you that its far more dangerous having a security system that is insecure being sold to the public as secure."

The use of RFID chips in biometric passports has been criticised by many in the computer security industry, who consider them fundamentally insecure because they are so easy to copy. The chips are widely used in office access cards, hotel key cards and even in school canteens as payment swipe cards.

The United States, where the "e-passports" will start to be issued from October, has already changed the design of its new passport to incorporate a metal shield in the cover to protect them from unauthorised readers when they are closed - a security feature that it may not be possible to include in a card.

Campaigners against the system, including Mr Booth, say that the passports could make their holders the target of terrorists, who could use unauthorised card readers to identify someone's nationality when they are travelling.

The security flaw demonstrated by Herr Grunwald could be an issue for countries that introduced automated passport inspection, which could be duped by cloned chips.

The cloning of biometric and other personal data would also open the way for identity theft, a fast-growing crime which, in theory, the passports and future ID cards are designed to prevent.

But Tony Blair said last week that the plan to introduce ID cards would be a "major plank" of Labour's next election manifesto, despite leaked e-mails published in *The Sunday Times* showing that senior civil servants had **serious doubts** about the feasibility of the scheme.

Gus Hosein, a visiting fellow in information systems at the London School of Economics, and one of the authors of a report last year that estimated the cost of the ID card scheme at up to £19.2 billion, said of Herr Grunwald's cloning: "It just shows that this is an incredibly stupied technology to put in passports."

Dr Hosein, who is also a senior fellow of Privacy International, added: "It's bad public policy. You're spending so much money - billions across the world - on this technology, only to find new problems with it every day. New Labour seems to be obsessed with any form of technology that they think can solve a social ill, particularly if it gives more information to central government."

**Copyright 2006** Times Newspapers Ltd.

This service is provided on Times Newspapers' **standard Terms and Conditions** . Please read our **Privacy Policy** . To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from The Times, visit the **Syndication website** .