

Wisconsin company holds 'chip party' to implant microchips in workers

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Tony Danna, left, vice president of international development at Three Square Market, gets a microchip implanted in his left hand during an event Tuesday at the company's headquarters in River Falls.

JEFF BAENEN, ASSOCIATED PRESS

RIVER FALLS — A brief sting is all employees of a Wisconsin technology company said they felt Tuesday when they received a microchip implant in their hand that will allow them to open doors, log onto computers or buy snacks in the break room by simply waving their hand.

Three Square Market, also known as 32M, said 41 of its 85 employees agreed to be voluntarily microchipped during a “chip party” at the company’s headquarters in River Falls.

Melissa Timmins, vice president of sales at 32M, said she was initially apprehensive but decided to give the chip a chance.

“I planned for the worst and it wasn’t bad at all,” said Timmins, who received a microchip in her left hand on Monday. “Just a little prick.”

But marketing executive Katie Langer passed, citing health concerns related to putting a foreign object into her hand, while noting the chip received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2004.

“But that’s still not very long term in my book, so I’d just like to know more about the long-term health effects,” Langer said, adding that she is not ruling out a future implant of the \$300 microchip paid for by Three Square Market.

32M, which operates 2,000 self-checkout kiosks for companies in 20 countries, partnered with Sweden’s BioHax International, where employees have been using the implants.

Company leaders said this is the first U.S. appearance of technology already available in Europe.

Officials said the data in the microchip is encrypted and does not use GPS, so it cannot be used to track employees or obtain private information. The company hopes the microchips eventually can be used on everything from air travel to public transit and storing medical information.

Professor Jeremy Hajek of the Illinois Institute of Technology said microchipping started years ago with veterinarians implanting the device in dogs and cats that might get lost.

“And so there’s a little bit of a ... demeaning factor that this is what they do to little animals,” Hajek said.

But Noelle Chesley, an associate professor of sociology at UW-Milwaukee, said she thinks implanting microchips into employees — and all people — is the wave of the future.

Many of those at the edge of developing those technologies “believe we are going to be combining technology in our bodies,” Chesley said.