Firms tag workers to improve efficiency

Level 2 | Intermediate

① Key Vocabulary

Match these words and phrases from the text with their definitions:

1.	electronic tags	2.	battery farms
3.	surveillance	4.	privacy
5.	ethical	6.	repetitive strain injury
7.	theft	8.	productivity

a. the right of people to do things without being watched by other people
b. the crime of stealing
c. small devices used to check where someone is
d. the rate at which someone works or the rate at which goods are produced
e. places where chickens are kept in very small cages
f. relating to beliefs about right and wrong
g. the careful watching of someone by the police or the army
h. a medical condition caused by doing the same action again and again

② Scanning

The text mentions a number of reasons for introducing new computer technology into the workplace. Look in the text and find the order in which these reasons appear. Write the letters *a* to *h* in the boxes next to each sentence, with *a* for the first one and *h* for the last one.

1. to cut out waste ☐
2. to check on whether workers are taking unauthorised breaks ☐
3. to send orders ☐
4. to reorder goods ☐
5. to instruct workers to collect goods ☐
6. to work out the shortest time needed to complete a job ☐
7. to cut costs ☐
8. to increase efficient delivery of goods to supermarkets ☐
10. to remove waste and reduce theft ☐

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David Hencke

Workers in British warehouses are beginning to wear "electronic tags". Companies are asking them to wear small computers to cut costs and increase the efficient delivery of goods and food to supermarkets, a report revealed this week. New US satellite-based and radio-based computer technology means that some workplaces are more like "battery farms" that conditions are similar to "surveillance in prison", according to a report from a professor of geography at Durham University, Michael Blakemore.

The technology was introduced from the US at the start of the year and is spreading rapidly. Almost 10,000 employees are using it to supply well-known companies. Now trade unionists are asking for the introduction of special measures to protect workers' privacy.

Under the system workers have to wear computers on their wrists, arms and fingers, and in some cases they have to put on a vest containing a computer that instructs them where to go to collect goods from warehouse shelves. The system also allows direct access to the individual's computer so orders can be sent from the store. The computer can also check on whether workers are taking unauthorised breaks and can work out the shortest time a worker needs to complete a job.

Some experts are worried that the system could make Britain, which already has the largest number of street security cameras in the world, the most surveyed society in the world.

In his report for the GMB union, Professor Blakemore said there were a number of ethical questions with the new technology. There was also a danger that computers were taking over humans rather than humans using computers. People are also worried that the new technology might create industrial injuries because of the need for workers to make repetitive movements with their arms and wrists, similar to the repetitive strain injuries found in people who use computers too much.

But the companies say that the system makes the delivery of food more efficient. It also cuts out waste, reduces theft and can reorder goods more quickly. A spokeswoman for one supermarket said that the company was not using the technology to monitor its staff. She said it was making employees' work easier and reducing the need for paper.

But at the GMB's annual conference in Newcastle this week one of the union's national officers, Paul Campbell, said: "We are getting reports of people leaving their jobs after just a few days and in some cases just a few hours. They are all saying they don't like the job because they have no input. They are just following a computer's instructions".

Companies in the US are currently developing other monitoring devices, including ones that can check on the productivity of secretaries by measuring the number of times they hit the keys on their word processors; they are also developing satellite technology to monitor productivity in manufacturing jobs.

The Guardian Weekly 10/06/2005, page 9

Firms tag workers to improve efficiency

Level 2 | Intermediate

3 Comprehension check

Are these statements True or False according to the text:

1. Trade unions are worried about the privacy of workers.
2. Some companies believe the new system will increase the need for paper.
3. People could be injured by the new technology.
4. The computers will be able to tell when workers are taking unauthorised breaks.
5. Workers wear the tags on their ankles.
6. The technology was developed in the UK.
7. Britain has more street cameras than any other country in the world.
8. The technology is also used in battery farms and prisons.

4 Vocabulary - Word-building

Complete the table

Adjective	Noun
1. efficient	_____
2. private	_____
3. worried	_____
4. similar	_____
5. authorised	_____
6. secure	_____
7. industrial	_____
8. repetitive	_____

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Level 2 | Intermediate

5 Vocabulary - Word stress

Put the following words from the text into the correct column according to their stress pattern:

surveillance	electronic	security	unauthorised
efficient	technology	individual	industrial
repetitive	computer	introduction	according

A	B	C
o • o o	o • o	o o • o

6 Grammar - Infinitives of purpose

Look at this example from the text:

Companies are asking them to wear small computers to cut costs.

Make similar sentences by matching the beginnings and the endings. Check your answers in the text.

1. Trade unionists want special measures …
2. The computer tells workers where to go …
3. Companies are asking workers to wear electronic tags …
4. Almost 10,000 employees are using the technology …
5. New technology will soon be able …
6. A spokeswoman for a supermarket said the company was not using the technology …

a. … to increase the efficient delivery of goods and food to supermarkets.
b. … to monitor productivity in manufacturing jobs.
c. … to monitor its staff.
d. … to protect workers' privacy.
e. … to supply well-known companies supermarkets.
f. … to collect goods from warehouse shelves.

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Level 2 | Intermediate

7 Discussion

1. Do you agree with the use of computer technology like these electronic tags?
2. To what extent are computers invading our privacy?

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KEY

1   Key words

1. c	2.e	3. g	4. a
5. f	6. h	7. b	8. d

2   Scanning

1. g	2. e	3. c	4. h
5. d	6. f	7. a	8. b

3   Comprehension Check   True or False?

1. T	2. F	3. T	4. T
5. F	6. F	7. T	8. F

4   Vocabulary 1   Word-building

1. efficiency
2. privacy
3. worry
4. similarity
5. authorisation
6. security
7. industry
8. repetition

5.   Word stress

A: security, unauthorised. technology, industrial, repetitive
B: surveillance, efficient, according
C: electronic, introduction, individual

6.   Grammar focus

1. d	2. f	3. a	4. e	5. b	6. c