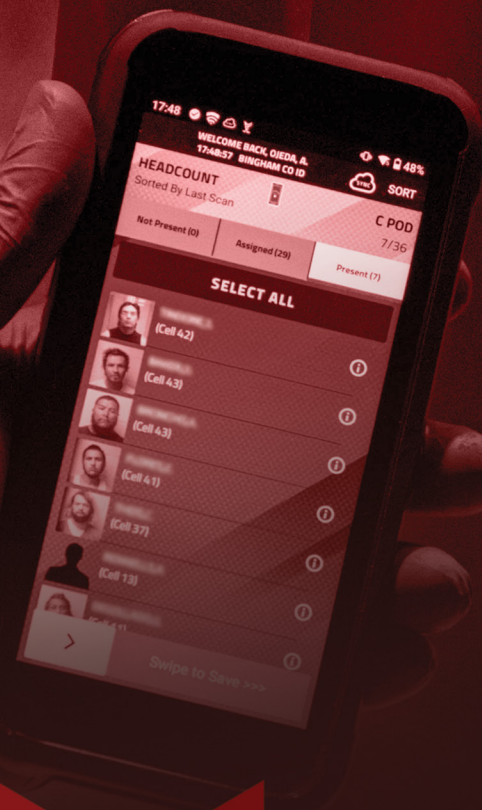


THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO INMATE IDENTIFICATION

Learn which inmate identification method
is best suited for your facility's unique needs



GUARDIAN RFID
WARRIOR TECHNOLOGY

FOREWORD

Effective inmate identification is a foundational element in maintaining safety, security, and regulatory compliance within correctional facilities of all sizes. From intake to release, consistently and accurately identifying every individual in custody helps prevent oversights, minimize risks, and keep daily operations running smoothly.

Wristbands and ID cards are two of the most common identification tools in correctional facilities. Beyond confirming an inmate's identity, they also provide key inmate details—such as date of birth, housing assignment, classification level, and medical alerts—ensuring staff have accurate, real-time information to guide every decision.

How can an agency decide if these methods are suited for their unique facility operations? And what should one consider when debating between wristbands and ID cards? How does each method compare in terms of strengths and limitations? Is one inherently better for certain facility types, security levels, or workflows?

In this guide, we'll explore:

- The importance of accurate and reliable inmate identification
- The primary methods of inmate identification and their key differences
- Which inmate identification method best aligns with your facility's distinctive needs



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Products Mentioned.....	3
What is the Importance of Inmate Identification?.....	4
What are Inmate ID Cards?.....	5
▪ Who primarily uses ID cards?.....	5
▪ What can be printed onto an inmate ID card?.....	5
▪ Can officer ID cards be printed, too?.....	6
▪ Should we use ID card clips, lanyards, or key back?.....	6
▪ What are common policies for inmate ID cards?.....	6
▪ What are the specifications for an ID card?.....	7
▪ ID card printers.....	7
What are Inmate Wristbands?.....	7
▪ Who primarily uses wristbands?.....	8
▪ What information can be printed on an inmate's wristband?.....	8
▪ What colors do wristbands come in?.....	8
▪ How durable are wristbands?.....	8
▪ Wristband printers.....	8
Are Wristbands or ID Cards More Durable?.....	9
Which Method Is More Secure?.....	9
Which Inmate Identification Method is Best for My Facility?.....	10
Conclusion.....	10

COMMAND|CLOUD®

COMMAND CLOUD

PRODUCTS MENTIONED

Command Cloud's patented real-time compliance monitor tracking¹, featuring audible and color-coded alerts on mobile and Web-based applications (Mission Command and Mobile Command XR, respectively) both immediately before a check is due, as well as immediately after the check is late. Compliance Monitor helps remind staff when checks are due from any device to ensure staff make their rounds according to agency policy, ultimately reducing liability.

¹U.S. Patent No. 11,574,317



SPARTAN 3

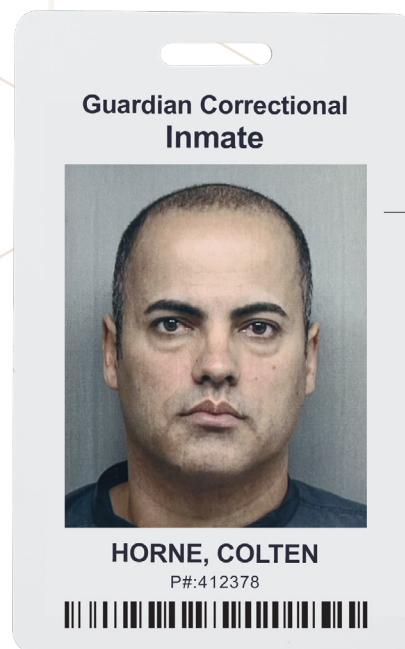
SPARTAN

SPARTAN is a ruggedized Android device.

MOBILE COMMAND XR™

MOBILE COMMAND XR

Mobile Command XR is mobile inmate tracking software that runs on SPARTAN.



ID CARDS

ID cards are wearable, detachable identification tools that display an inmate's mugshot and other pertinent information.

SPARTAN 3, ID card, and wristband images are all actual size.

RFID WRISTBANDS

RFID wristbands are wearable identification tools secured on the inmate's wrist, displaying a mugshot and other key information.



WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF INMATE IDENTIFICATION?

Accurate inmate identification is essential for correctional facilities of all sizes, supporting everything from:

- **Security:** Reliable inmate identification ensures each inmate is properly identified to prevent mix-ups, unauthorized access to certain materials or areas, or misidentification at release.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Daily officer tasks such as headcounts, meal distribution, housing assignments, and medical care are streamlined to operate much more efficiently when there is no doubt surrounding the inmate in question.
- **Officer Accountability:** Immediate access to accurate, real-time records of inmate status, movements, and history empowers officers to confidently interact with the correct inmate in any situation.
- **Compliance:** Accurate inmate identification helps staff meet regulatory standards and reduce any legal risks through thorough documentation.

While there are many different methods of inmate identification, there are two methods that are considered to be the most effective and reliable market-wide: [RFID wristbands](#) and [ID cards](#). For the scope of this Ultimate Guide, we are driving our focus on RFID (Radio-Frequency Identification) technology and the role it plays in strengthening inmate identification through wristbands and ID cards.

Both inmate ID cards and wristbands contain a unique RFID value that pulls up specific inmate information when scanned, including details such as full name, date of birth, classification level, and other security-critical details. These tools enable facilities to:

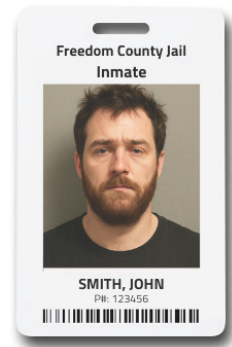
- **Track Inmate Movements:** Scanning the ID of an inmate being moved allows staff to monitor their location, document out-of-cell time, and reduce the risk of escape or unauthorized movement.
- **Ensure Accurate Medication and Medical Treatment:** Inmates present their ID for scanning when receiving medication or visiting medical staff to ensure the correct medication is administered and medical attention is properly documented.
- **Streamline Meal Pass:** Scanning inmate IDs during meal distribution ensures each inmate receives their correct meal—preventing double-traying, and ensuring meals specifically prepared for inmates with dietary restrictions or allergies are distributed correctly.
- **Manage Supply Distribution:** When inmates check out returnable or non-returnable supply items, their IDs are scanned to track possession of items as well as document the access to essential supplies.

Inmate ID cards and wristbands are indispensable tools for identity verification, operational efficiency, and facility safety. They help corrections professionals maintain control, minimize errors, and ensure the safety of both inmates and staff.



WHAT ARE INMATE ID CARDS?

Inmate ID cards are much like those used by students or hospital staff. They're usually clipped to an inmate's shirt or other clothing, keeping them visible to the naked eye and accessible for quick scanning. Each card carries a unique digital identifier, ensuring that no inmate is ever linked to more than one card at a time.



Who primarily uses ID cards?

Beyond several state Departments of Corrections (DOCs), many large jails (1,000+ inmates) and midsize jails (500+ beds) also rely on ID cards for inmate identification. For example, the [Desoto County Adult Detention Center in Hernando, Mississippi](#), uses ID cards in its mid-size facility while larger agencies such as the Alameda County Sheriff's Office in Oakland, California, and the Polk County Sheriff's Office in Lakeland, Florida, have adopted the same approach.

For these facilities in particular—and for roughly 40% of the GUARDIAN RFID user community—ID cards are the preferred method of inmate identification. This favored method is driven by two primary factors:

- **Wristband Failure Rates.** While wristbands have been in use for decades, many agencies have abandoned them due to frequent replacements—typically due to intentional damage from inmates or normal wear and tear. Depending on the general behavior or ruliness of an inmate population, wristbands can sometimes be unsustainable long-term.
- **Consistency with DOC Standards.** Most mid-size and large jails strive to align with the standards of their state's Department of Corrections, where ID cards are typically the standard for inmate identification.



What can be printed onto an inmate ID card?

First, it's essential to understand where your inmate population's personal information is stored. Is it maintained in a jail management system, or scattered across paper records in a warehouse? Wherever these critical details reside, your agency must determine how to ensure that information is accurately reflected on the inmate identification method you choose.

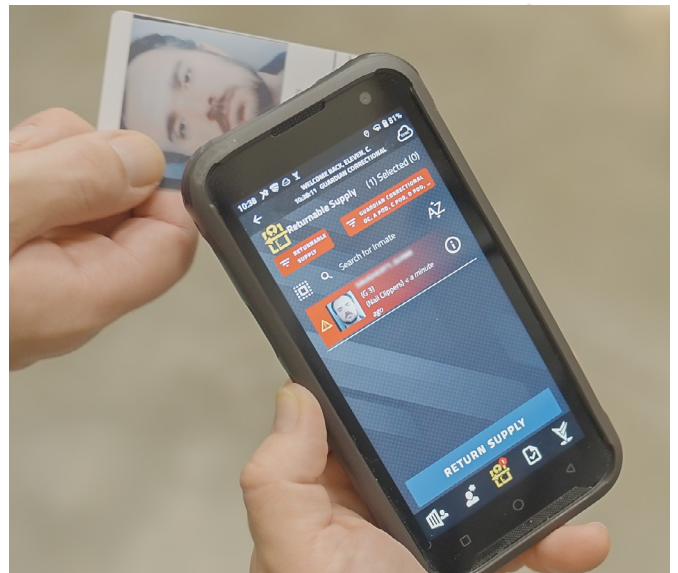
If your agency uses [Command Cloud](#), then you're covered. Any inmate data stored in your jail management system can be integrated into [Command Cloud via its REST API](#), allowing nearly all the information you want to appear on an ID card to be included accurately and efficiently.

The most common information printed onto an ID card includes the inmate's:

- Mugshot
- First name
- Last name
- Permanent booking number
- Booking number
- Facility name

GUARDIAN RFID supports color-coding on ID cards to denote different classification levels if an agency prefers, offering an extra measure of visual identification.

Because mid-size and large jails—as well as state DOCs—typically operate multiple interconnected systems, Command Cloud supports printing barcodes directly onto inmate ID cards. This ensures seamless interoperability with third-party platforms. Command Cloud can natively generate both CODE128 and CODE39 barcodes, enabling integration with commissary systems, electronic medical records (EMR), and more.





Can officer ID cards be printed, too?

Yes, they can. In fact, it's often more common for agencies to print officer, deputy, and civilian ID cards than inmate ID cards. These ID cards can include similar data elements, with the most common being:

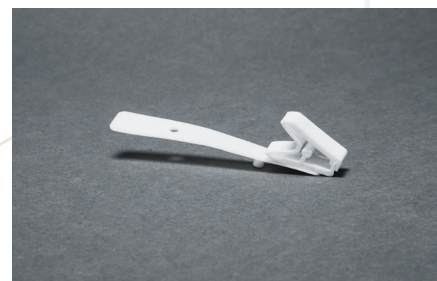
- First name
- Last name
- Facility name
- Department or agency logo

Officer ID cards also serve as the primary mechanism for logging into Mobile Command XR, making them more versatile than RFIDs. Unlike fobs, officer ID cards provide visual identification—so if one is misplaced, it's immediately clear who it belongs to.

Should we use ID card clips, lanyards, or key backs?

The most common way to wear and display an inmate ID card is with a plastic ID card clip. For inmate safety reasons, lanyards are rarely used, with the same concern applying to key backs.

Inmates often place their ID card in their uniform shirt breast pocket—a practice we advise against. We recommend that inmates keep their ID cards visibly displayed on their shirts during waking hours, which we will address further in the next section.



What are common policies for inmate ID cards?

Most jails and DOCs require ID cards to be displayed front-facing and on the inmate during waking hours, secured by a plastic ID card clip.

Many jails that use GUARDIAN RFID have worked with their county attorney to add additional charges for inmates who intentionally damage their identification, whether wristbands or ID cards. Some county attorneys will add charges such as "destruction of government property" or "attempting to escape from custody" – particularly after repeatedly damaging or destroying their identification.

Strong policies and forceful consequences for removing or tampering with ID cards do increase the lifespan of each ID card. Swift consequences for misusing, removing, or damaging an ID card will help increase inmate compliance and ultimately prevent or reduce ID card replacement rates.

What are the specifications (size, composition, etc.) for an ID card?

Material	High Quality PVC
Size	85.5mm x 54mm (3.36" x 2.12")
Thickness	ISO standard .76mm
RFID/NFC	NFC, ISO 14443 Type A and B; FeliCa, Mifare and ISO 15693 cards
Finish	Gloss and matte options
Orientation	Landscape and portrait
ID Card Clip	Supported (No ID Card Clip also supported)
Printers	Most ID Card Printers (Most Warriors use Zebra ID Card Printers, such as the Zebra ZXP Series 7 Card Printer)

ID card printers

The quality of the ID card printer is a significant factor in how long the printed information on ID cards lasts. High-quality printers, especially those with lamination, help preserve ink and prevent fading. While lower-cost printers may reduce upfront expenses, they often result in more frequent reprints, ultimately costing more time and money. That's why it's important to research your options carefully to ensure you're getting the best value.

At GUARDIAN RFID, we've standardized on the Zebra ZXP Series 7 Pro ID card printer, a reliable solution that supports both single- and dual-sided printing. If your agency already uses ID card printers, GUARDIAN RFID ID cards are compatible with virtually all major brands. For added assurance, we're happy to provide free ID card samples for test printing.

WHAT ARE INMATE WRISTBANDS?

Wristbands serve as a wearable form of inmate identification, with the two most common wristband types being either simply printed or laminated:

- 1. Printed Wristbands:** Printable wristbands are a simple form of inmate identification. This type of wristband commonly has a paper-like feel and is frequently made of Tyvek, featuring an adhesive or mechanical closure. Since the offender's identification is printed directly onto the wristband, printable wristbands do not require a rolling laminator.
- 2. Laminated Wristbands:** Laminated wristbands are constructed by placing printed information onto a label or sheet of paper that fits within an unlaminated pouch. The wristband is then placed into a protective cardboard sleeve. This protective sleeve goes through a rolling laminator, using heat to seal the identifying information into the wristband itself. The bands can be secured with a metal or plastic fastener.

The main difference between the two is that laminated wristbands tend to hold up longer compared to printed wristbands.

Inmate wristbands can be customized to your facility's liking, including color-coding for quick visual identification of inmate classification. Each wristband is tailored to fit the inmate and display essential personal information, including their full name, mugshot, and any other pertinent information that the facility deems fit.





Who primarily uses wristbands?

Wristbands are generally best suited for short-term stays or situations where quick visual identification is essential. While facilities of all sizes use them, they are especially common in county jails, as they are less expensive than ID cards. They also tend to be more prone to damage, especially if not laminated, reducing their lifespan compared to ID cards.

Due to these factors, wristbands are often chosen by facilities that house inmates temporarily, as they align with the shorter average length of stay.

What information can be printed on an inmate's wristband?

Similar to inmate ID cards, you can print almost anything that's stored in your Command Cloud database onto an inmate wristband. The most common information printed onto a wristband includes the inmate's:

- Mugshot
- Facility name
- First name
- Booking number
- Last name
- Permanent booking number

What colors do wristbands come in?

Inmates can be classified based on factors including their charge(s), history, behavior, and other risk levels. To support these classifications, facilities can assign different colored wristbands to quickly identify and manage inmates according to their risk category.

While available colors vary by vendor, GUARDIAN RFID offers eight color options: orange, white, teal, blue, purple, yellow, red, and black. This range provides facilities with greater flexibility and improves staff awareness of higher-risk inmates.

How durable are wristbands?

The durability of wristbands is dependent on a few factors:

- **Wristband Type:** Printed inmate wristbands generally last between three and five weeks with normal wear and tear. However, that time significantly decreases when inmates are more aggressive and determined to deliberately damage or remove their wristbands. When done correctly, laminated wristbands tend to hold up longer compared to printed wristbands.
- **Fastener Type:** The fastener used is typically either metal or plastic, with the metal fasteners being more durable than those made of plastic. A crimping tool is needed for the metal closures, making it difficult for inmate to tamper with their wristbands. Although not impossible to remove, using metal fasteners greatly increases wristband longevity.
- **Lamination Quality (if applicable):** Even after lamination, the bordering ends of the band aren't always fully sealed. There is also a hole punched into the wristband for the rivets that leaves room for water leakage. The bands should be laminated at 325°F, as temperatures too high or too low will cause poor lamination and decreased durability.

Wristband printers

When printing inmate wristband information, users print the required details onto a sticker—GUARDIAN RFID uses an LX500 printer. Once the sticker is applied to the wristband, it can then be laminated to protect the information and provide added durability.

If the facility uses RFID technology, the RFID chip is placed inside the wristband before lamination. Running it through a laminator secures the chip in place while also extending the wristband's lifespan. For best results, GUARDIAN RFID recommends using a 12" laminator for faster processing.



ARE WRISTBANDS OR ID CARDS MORE DURABLE?

When deciding which inmate tracking method best suits their facility, agencies should consider both the general behavior of their inmate population and the average length of stay, as these factors play a key role in determining the most effective option.

As for durability, ID cards can last several years when properly cared for, though their typical lifespan is 12 to 18 months—assuming inmates handle them responsibly. If bent, damaged, or misused, they may need replacement much sooner. Printed inmate wristbands, however, only last three to five weeks with normal wear and tear, which can be accelerated due to inmate misuse.

Unlike wristbands, ID cards are less exposed to moisture. For example, inmates working in kitchens often have wristbands that come into contact with hot water, causing premature damage. Since ID cards are clipped to uniforms, they are far less likely to be damaged by direct water exposure, which contributes to their greater durability.

Printer quality also plays a major role in longevity. High-quality printers with lamination help preserve printed information and prevent fading. Lower-cost printers may reduce upfront expenses but typically result in more frequent reprints, adding to long-term costs. For the best return on investment, facilities should research and invest in a reliable printer.

ID cards generally outlast wristbands—but only if inmates use them responsibly. As with wristbands, enforcing clear policies and consequences for tampering or misuse is critical. Prompt disciplinary action helps maintain inmate compliance and significantly reduces replacement rates over time.

WHICH METHOD IS MORE SECURE?

Inmate identification transferability is one of the biggest safety and security concerns for any facility. When properly secured, wristbands pose very little risk of being transferred from one inmate to another. Applying fasteners tightly, laminating at the correct temperature, and fitting them “handcuff tight” ensures that wristbands remain secure. However, if any of these steps are overlooked, there is still a chance inmates could pass them off.

ID cards, on the other hand, are not physically secured to inmates, making them easier to lose or exchange. To reduce this risk, facilities should require inmates to wear their ID cards on the front of their uniforms using a durable clip, with rules in place to keep them visible at all times during waking hours. Strong policy enforcement is key: many jails discipline noncompliant inmates by limiting privileges such as commissary, visitation, or recreation. These consequences discourage attempts to exchange or conceal ID cards and reinforce inmate compliance.

Wristbands are inherently less transferable when properly applied, but with clear rules and consistent enforcement, ID cards can be managed securely and remain a reliable method of inmate identification.

WHICH INMATE IDENTIFICATION METHOD IS BEST FOR MY FACILITY?

If you're asking which inmate identification method is best for your facility and inmate population, the answer is: *it depends*.

Facilities with an average daily population (ADP) under 500 beds typically opt for wristbands, while larger facilities with an ADP over 500 generally prefer ID cards. Some smaller facilities with an ADP of 50 or fewer inmates may choose not to use either option, instead manually selecting inmate name(s) via Mobile Command XR's electronic roster, known as Population, or by scanning strategically placed RFID tags known as Hard Tags.

Ultimately, it depends on the facility, as organizations of any size may select the option that best fits their needs and preferences.



CONCLUSION

Selecting the right inmate identification method is critical to maintaining safety, security, and operational efficiency in your facility. When making this choice, take into account your inmate population, facility policies, and data requirements.

By investing in durable materials, enforcing clear procedures, and ensuring proper application, you can maximize reliability and security for any identification method. Ultimately, the most effective solution is one that aligns with your facility's unique needs, workflows, and priorities, supporting smooth operations every day.





COMMAND | CLOUD[®]

THE OFFICER EXPERIENCE PLATFORM (OXP)

MOBILE COMMAND **XR**[™]

MISSION COMMAND[™]

*OPERATIONAL
INTELLIGENCE*[™]

VISIONOPS[™]

ACADEMY
UNLIMITED

*MED+*MANAGER

PROTECTING THE LINE



GUARDIAN RFID
WARRIOR TECHNOLOGY

GuardianRFID.com • 855.777.7343 • Youtube.com/GuardianRFID

12PG-UG11-11/2025

INTERESTED
IN A
FREE DEMO?

Request one today!

