

IMPROVED FORM FACTOR AND ELECTROMAGNETIC INTERFERENCE PROTECTION FOR PROCESS DEVICE WIRELESS ADAPTERS

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BACKGROUND

In industrial settings, control systems are used to monitor and control inventories of industrial and chemical processes, and the like. Typically, the control system performs these functions using field devices distributed at key locations in the industrial process and coupled to the control circuitry in the control room by a process control loop. Field devices generally perform a function, such as sensing a parameter or operating upon the process, in a distributed control or process monitoring system.

Some field devices include a transducer. A transducer is understood to mean either a device that generates an output signal based on a physical input or that generates a physical output based on an input signal. Typically, a transducer transforms an input into an output having a different form. Types of transducers include various analytical equipment, pressure sensors, thermistors, thermocouples, strain gauges, flow transmitters, positioners, actuators, solenoids, indicator lights, and others.

Typically, each field device also includes communication circuitry that is used for communicating with a process control room, or other circuitry, over a process control loop. In some installations, the process control loop is also used to deliver a regulated current and/or voltage to the field device for powering the field device. The process control loop also carries data, either in an analog or digital format.

Traditionally, analog field devices have been connected to the control room by two-wire process control current loops, with each device connected to the control room by a single two-wire control loop. Typically, a voltage differential is maintained between the two wires within a range of voltages from 12-45 volts for analog mode and 9-50 volts for digital mode. Some analog field

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devices transmit a signal to the control room by controlling the current running through the current loop to a current proportional to the sensed process variable. Other field devices can perform an action under the control of the control room by modulating the magnitude of the current through the loop. In addition to, or
5 in the alternative, the process control loop can carry digital signals used for communication with field devices.

In some installations, wireless technologies have begun to be used to communicate with field devices. Wireless operation simplifies field device wiring and set-up. However, the majority of field devices are hardwired to a
10 process control room and does not use wireless communication techniques.

Industrial process plants often contain hundreds or even thousands of field devices. Many of these field devices contain sophisticated electronics and are able to provide more data than the traditional analog 4-20 mA measurements. For a number of reasons, cost among them, many plants do not
15 take advantage of the extra data that may be provided by such field devices. This has created a need for a wireless adapter for such field devices that can attach to the field devices and transmit data back to a control system or other monitoring or diagnostic system or application via a wireless network.

20 SUMMARY

A process device wireless adapter includes a wireless communications module, a metallic housing, and an antenna. The wireless communications module is configured to communicatively couple to a process device and to a wireless receiver. The metallic housing surrounds the wireless communication
25 module and has a first end and a second end. The first end is configured to attach to the process device. In one embodiment, the metallic shield contacts the housing second end such that the metallic shield and the housing form a continuous conductive surface. The antenna is communicatively coupled to the wireless communications module and separated from the wireless
30 communications module by the metallic shield. Preferably, the wireless

communications module illustratively includes a printed circuit board that has a length that is greater than its width.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

5 FIG. 1 is a diagrammatic view of an exemplary field device with which a wireless adapter in accordance with the present invention is useful.

 FIG. 2 is a block diagram of the field device shown in FIG. 1.

 FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an improved form factor wireless adapter coupled to a process device.

10 FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional perspective view of the wireless adapter of FIG. 3.

 FIG. 5 is a simplified block diagram of a process control or monitoring system that includes a wireless adapter.

15 FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of a wireless adapter that reduces or eliminates electromagnetic interference in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

 FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional view of another wireless adapter that reduces or eliminates electromagnetic interference in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

20 FIG. 8 is a simplified cross-sectional view showing a wireless adapter coupled to a process device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

25 Embodiments of the present invention generally include a wireless adapter configured to couple to a process device and to communicate to a process control room or a remote monitoring system or diagnostic application running on a computer. Process devices are commonly installed in areas that have limited access. Certain embodiments described herein include wireless adapters having improved form factors. The improved form factors enable
30 wireless adapters to be coupled to process devices in a wide variety of

environments, including environments that may not otherwise allow for a wireless adapter to be coupled to a process device. Process devices are also commonly installed in environments having electromagnetic interference (EMI) that may negatively impact the performance or operation of a wireless adapter.

5 Some embodiments described herein include wireless adapters having electrically conductive enclosures that reduce or eliminate negative effects from EMI.

FIGS. 1 and 2 are diagrammatic and block diagram views of an exemplary field device with which a wireless adapter in accordance with an
10 embodiment of the present invention is useful. Process control or monitoring system 10 includes a control room or control system 12 that couples to one or more field devices 14 over a two-wire process control loop 16. Examples of process control loop 16 include analog 4-20 mA communication, hybrid protocols which include both analog and digital communication such as the
15 Highway Addressable Remote Transducer (HART®) standard, as well as all-digital protocols such as the FOUNDATION™ Fieldbus standard. Generally process control loop protocols can both power the field device and allow communication between the field device and other devices.

In this example, field device 14 includes circuitry 18 coupled to
20 actuator/transducer 20 and to process control loop 16 via terminal board 21 in housing 23. Field device 14 is illustrated as a process variable generator in that it couples to a process and senses an aspect, such as temperature, pressure, pH, flow, or other physical properties of the process and provides an indication thereof. Other examples of field devices include valves, actuators, controllers,
25 and displays.

Generally field devices are characterized by their ability to operate in the "field" which may expose them to environmental stresses, such as temperature, humidity and pressure. In addition to environmental stresses, field devices must often withstand exposure to corrosive, hazardous and/or even explosive
30 atmospheres. Further, such devices must also operate in the presence of

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vibration and/or electromagnetic interference. Field devices of the sort illustrated in FIG. 1 represent a relatively large installed base of legacy devices, which are designed to operate in an entirely wired manner.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an improved form factor wireless adapter 300 coupled to a process device 350, and FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional perspective view of adapter 300. Adapter 300 includes a mechanical attachment region 301 (e.g. a region having a threaded surface) that attaches to device 350 via a standard field device conduit 352. Examples of suitable conduit connections include 1/2-14 NPT, M20x1.5, G1/2, and 3/8-18 NPT. Adapter 300 is illustratively attached to or detached from device 350 by rotating adapter 300 about an axis of rotation 370. Attachment region 301 is preferably hollow in order to allow conductors 344 to couple adapter 300 to device 350.

Adapter 300 includes an enclosure main body or housing 302 and end cap 304. Housing 302 and cap 304 provide environmental protection for the components included within adapter 300. As can be seen in FIG. 4, housing 302 encloses or surrounds one or more wireless communications circuit boards 310. Each circuit board 310 is illustratively rectangularly shaped and has a length 312 that extends along or is parallel to axis of rotation 370 (shown in FIG. 3). Each board 310 also has a width 314 that extends radially outward from or is perpendicular to axis of rotation 370.

In an embodiment, circuit board length 312 and width 314 are adjusted or selected to enable adapter 300 to be coupled to process device 350 in a wide variety of environments. For instance, process device 350 may be in an environment that only has a limited amount of space for the width 314 of a circuit board 310. In such a case, the width 314 of the circuit board is decreased such that it can fit within the environment. The length 312 of the circuit board is correspondingly increased to compensate for the reduced width 314. This enables circuit board 310 to be able to include all of the needed electronic components while having a form factor that fits within the process device environment. In one embodiment, length 312 is greater than width 314 (i.e. the

ratio of length to width is greater than one). Embodiments of the present disclosure are not however limited to any particular ratios or dimensions. It should also be noted that the length and/or diameter of housing 302 and cap 304 are illustratively adjusted such that the overall length and diameter/width of wireless adapter 300 is minimized (i.e. the length and diameter of housing 302 and cap 304 are sized only as large as is needed to accommodate the enclosed components).

FIG. 5 is a simplified block diagram of a process control or monitoring system 500 in which a control room or control system 502 communicatively couples to field device 350 through wireless adapter 300. Wireless adapter 300 includes a wireless communications module 310 and an antenna 320. Wireless communications module 310 is coupled to process device controller 356 and interacts with external wireless devices (e.g. control system 502 or other wireless devices or monitoring systems as illustrated in FIG. 5) via antenna 320 based upon data from controller 356. Depending upon the application, wireless communications module 310 may be adapted to communicate in accordance with any suitable wireless communication protocol including, but not limited to: wireless networking technologies (such as IEEE 802.11b wireless access points and wireless networking devices built by Linksys of Irvine, California); cellular or digital networking technologies (such as Microburst® by Aeris Communications Inc. of San Jose, California); ultra wide band, free space optics, Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), General Packet Radio Service (GPRS); Code Division Multiple Access (CDMA); spread spectrum technology, infrared communications techniques; SMS (Short Messaging Service/text messaging); a known Bluetooth Specification, such as Bluetooth Core Specification Version 1.1 (February 22, 2001), available from the Bluetooth SIG (www.bluetooth.com); and the Wireless HART® Specification published by the Hart Communication Foundation, for example. Relevant portions of the Wireless HART® Specification include: HCF_Spec 13, revision 7.0; HART Specification 65 – Wireless Physical Layer Specification;

HART Specification 75 – TDMA Data Link Layer Specification (TDMA refers to Time Division Multiple Access); HART Specification 85 – Network Management Specification; HART Specification 155 – Wireless Command Specification; and HART Specification 290 – Wireless Devices Specification. Further,
5 known data collision technology can be employed such that multiple units can coexist within wireless operating range of one another. Such collision prevention can include using a number of different radio-frequency channels and/or spread spectrum techniques.

Wireless communications module 310 can also include transducers for a
10 plurality of wireless communication methods. For example, primary wireless communication could be performed using relatively long distance communication methods, such as GSM or GPRS, while a secondary, or additional communication method could be provided for technicians, or operators near the unit, using for example, IEEE 802.11b or Bluetooth.

15 Field device 350 further includes power circuitry 352 and an actuator/transducer 354. In one embodiment, power from module 352 energizes controller 356 to interact with actuator/transducer 354 and wireless communications module 310. Power from module 352 may also energize components of wireless adapter 300. Process device controller 356 and wireless
20 communications module 310 illustratively interact with each other in accordance with a standard industry protocol such as 4-20 mA, HART®, FOUNDATION™ Fieldbus, Profibus-PA, Modbus, or CAN. Alternatively, the wireless adapter may be powered by its own power source such as a battery or from other sources such as from energy scavenging.

25 FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of a wireless adapter 600 that reduces or eliminates electromagnetic interference (EMI) in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Adapter 600 includes wireless communications module electronics 602 (e.g. one or more printed circuit boards), antenna 604, metallic housing or enclosure 606, a metallic shield 608,
30 non-metallic end cap 610 (e.g. a plastic radome), and a conductive elastomeric

gasket 612. Metallic enclosure 606 is illustratively made from metalized plastic or from a metal such as aluminum and has a cylindrical shape. Metallic shield 608 is illustratively made from a plastic plated with a conductive material or from a metal such as stamped sheet metal.

5 Gasket 612 fits within an annular ring 613 of enclosure 606. Gasket 612 is in contact with both metallic enclosure 606 and metallic shield 608 such that the three components form a continuous conductive surface. This conductive surface protects wireless communications module 602 from EMI.

 Metallic shield 608 has a small hole or aperture 609. Aperture 609
10 allows for an electrical connection 630 (e.g. a coaxial cable) to pass through shield 608 and to connect antenna 604 to wireless communications module 602. Alternatively, antenna 604 can be formed integrally with module 602, for example in the form of traces routed around an outside edge of a circuit board. In such a case, the integrally formed antenna 604 is passed through shield 608
15 through aperture 609.

 Non-metallic end cap 610 and metallic shield 608 surround antenna 604 and provide physical protection (e.g. environmental protection) for the antenna. Wireless signals are able to pass through non-metallic end cap 610. This allows for antenna 604 to transmit and receive wireless signals. In an embodiment,
20 shield 608 and antenna 604 are designed such that shield 608 is part of the ground plane of antenna 604.

 Metallic enclosure 606 has a small hole or aperture 607. Aperture 607 allows for electrical conductors or connections 611 to pass through. Connections 611 illustratively couple wireless adapter 600 to a process device such that
25 communication signals may be transferred between wireless adapter 600 and the process device. Adapter 600 illustratively communicates with a process device in accordance with an industry protocol, such as those set forth above (e.g. HART®). Connections 611 may also supply wireless adapter 600 with electrical power (e.g. current or voltage).

FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional view of another wireless adapter 700 that reduces or eliminates EMI in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Adapter 700 includes many of the same or similar components as adapter 600 and is numbered accordingly. Adapter 700 does not include a
5 conductive gasket like adapter 600. Instead, metallic shield 708 has electrically conductive tabs or spring fingers 718. Fingers 718 fit within the enclosure annular ring 712 such that shield 708 and enclosure 706 form a continuous conductive surface that surrounds wireless communications module 702. The surrounding conductive surface protects electronics within module 702 from
10 EMI.

In another embodiment of a wireless adapter, the electronics enclosure (e.g. enclosure 606 in FIG. 6 and enclosure 706 in FIG. 7) is made from a non-metallic material. The wireless adapter communications electronics (e.g. module 602 in FIG. 6 and module 702 in FIG. 7) are illustratively protected from EMI
15 by a separate metallic shield that is within the electronics enclosure and that surrounds the electronics.

In yet another embodiment of a wireless adapter, the adapter does not include an end cap (e.g. end cap 610 in FIG. 6) that encloses an antenna. Instead, a “rubber duck” style whip antenna is used. The whip antenna is positioned or
20 placed adjacent to the adapter shield (e.g. shield 608 in FIG. 6) and is left exposed to the environment.

Wireless adapters are illustratively made to meet intrinsic safety requirements and provide flame-proof (explosion-proof) capability. Additionally, wireless adapters optionally include potting within their electronic
25 enclosures to further protect the enclosed electronics. In such a case, the metallic shields of the wireless adapters may include one or more slots and/or holes to facilitate potting flow.

FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view of wireless adapter 800 coupled to a process device 850, in accordance with one embodiment of the present
30 invention. Device 850 includes an actuator/transducer 864 and measurement

circuitry 866. Measurement circuitry 866 couples to field device circuitry 868. Device 850 couples to two-wire process control loop 888 through a connection block 806 and wireless adapter 800. Further, wireless adapter 800 couples to the housing of device 850. In the example shown in FIG. 8, the coupling is through
5 an NPT conduit connection 809. The chassis of wireless adapter 800 illustratively couples to an electrical ground connection 810 of device 850 through wire 808. Device 850 includes a two-wire process control loop connection block 802 which couples to connections 812 from wireless adapter 800. As illustrated in FIG. 8, wireless adapter 800 can be threadably received in
10 conduit connection 809. Housing 820 carries antenna 826 to support circuitry of wireless adapter 800. Further, an end cap 824 can be sealably coupled to housing 820 and allow transmission of wireless signals therethrough. Note that in the arrangement shown in FIG. 8, five electrical connections are provided to wireless adapter 800 (i.e. four loop connections and an electrical ground
15 connection). These electrical and mechanical connection schemes are however for illustration purposes only. Embodiments of the present invention are not limited to any particular electrical or mechanical connection scheme, and embodiments illustratively include any electrical or mechanical connection scheme.

20 The term "field device" as used herein can be any device which is used in a process control or monitoring system and does not necessarily require placement in the "field." Field devices include, without limitation, process variable transmitters, digital valve controllers, flowmeters, and flow computers. The device can be located anywhere in the process control system including in a
25 control room or control circuitry. The terminals used to connect to the process control loop refer to any electrical connection and may not comprise physical or discrete terminals. Any appropriate wireless communication circuitry can be used as desired as can any appropriate communication protocol, frequency or communication technique. Power supply components are configured as desired
30 and are not limited to the configurations set forth herein or to any other

particular configuration. In some embodiments, the field device includes an address which can be included in any transmissions such that the device can be identified. Similarly, such an address can be used to determine if a received signal is intended for that particular device. However, in other embodiments, no address is utilized and data is simply transmitted from the wireless communication circuitry without any addressing information. In such a configuration, if receipt of data is desired, any received data may not include addressing information. In some embodiments, this may be acceptable. In others, other addressing techniques or identification techniques can be used such as assigning a particular frequency or communication protocol to a particular device, assigning a particular time slot or period to a particular device or other techniques. Any appropriate communication protocol and/or networking technique can be employed including token-based techniques in which a token is handed off between devices to thereby allow transmission or reception for the particular device.

As has been discussed, embodiments of the present invention improve wireless communications with a process device. Certain embodiments reduce electromagnetic interference with wireless adapters by providing a conductive surface that surrounds and protects the enclosed electrical communications modules or components. Antennas of wireless adapters are illustratively placed outside of the conductive surface such that they can communicate wirelessly with a control system. Antennas are optionally environmentally protected by enclosing the antennas with a non-metallic end cap that allows wireless signals to pass through. Additionally, embodiments include improved form factors that enable wireless adapters to be attached to process devices that are in confined environments that may not otherwise permit attachment of a wireless adapter. The form factors are illustratively improved by reducing a width of the wireless adapter and compensating for the width reduction by increasing a length of the adapter.

Although the present invention has been described with reference to particular embodiments, workers skilled in the art will recognize that changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A process device wireless adapter comprising:
 - a wireless communications module configured to communicatively
 - 5 couple to a process device and to a wireless receiver;
 - a metallic housing that surrounds the wireless communications module,
 - the metallic housing having a first end and a second end, the first
 - end configured to attach to the process device;
 - a metallic shield that contacts the housing second end such that the
 - 10 metallic shield and the housing form a substantially continuous
 - conductive surface; and
 - an antenna communicatively coupled to the wireless communications
 - module and separated from the wireless communications module
 - by the metallic shield.
- 15 2. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, wherein the wireless
- communications module comprises a printed circuit board, the printed circuit
- board having a length and a width, the length extending between the metallic
- housing first end and the metallic housing second end, and wherein the length is
- greater than the width.
- 20 3. The process device wireless adapter of claim 2, wherein the wireless
- communications module comprises a second printed circuit board, the second
- printed circuit board having a length and a width, the length of the second
- printed circuit board extending between the metallic housing first end and the
- metallic housing second end, and wherein the second printed circuit board
- 25 length is greater than the second printed circuit board width.
4. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, further comprising:
 - a non-metallic end cap that attaches to the housing and that encloses the
 - antenna.

5. The process device wireless adapter of claim 4, wherein the non-metallic end cap is a plastic radome.
6. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, wherein the metallic housing comprises aluminum.
- 5 7. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, wherein the metallic housing comprises metalized plastic.
8. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, wherein the metallic shield comprises stamped metal.
9. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, wherein the metallic shield
10 comprises plastic plated with a conductive material.
10. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, wherein the metallic shield contacts the housing second end through spring fingers.
11. The process device wireless adapter of claim 1, wherein the metallic shield contacts the housing second end through a conductive elastomeric gasket.
- 15 12. A process device wireless adapter comprising:
- a metallic housing having a length and a radius;
 - a printed circuit board within the metallic housing, the printed circuit
board having a width and a length, the length of the printed
circuit board running along the length of the metallic housing, the
20 length of the printed circuit board being greater than the width of
the printed circuit board, the printed circuit board configured to
be communicatively coupled to a process device;
 - a metallic shield that forms a continuous conductive surface with the
metallic housing, the metallic shield having a first side and a
25 second side, the printed circuit board positioned proximate the
first side; and
 - an antenna electrically connected to the printed circuit board through an
aperture in the metallic shield, the antenna positioned proximate
the metallic shield second side, the antenna configured to
30 wirelessly transmit communications to a wireless receiver and to

wirelessly receive communications from the wireless receiver.

13. The process device wireless adapter of claim 12, wherein the antenna is a “rubber duck” style whip antenna.

14. The process device wireless adapter of claim 12, wherein the metallic shield
5 is part of the ground plane of the antenna.

15. The process device wireless adapter of claim 12, wherein potting is included within the metallic housing.

16. The process device wireless adapter of claim 12, further comprising a mechanical attachment region configured to attach to a process device conduit.

10 17. The process device wireless adapter of claim 16, wherein the mechanical connection region includes a threaded surface.

18. A method of improving wireless communication capabilities of a process device comprising:

15 coupling a wireless communications module to the process device;
 coupling an antenna to the wireless communications module;
 at least partially surrounding the wireless communications module with a
 conductive surface to reduce electromagnetic interference with
 the module; and
 positioning the antenna outside of the conductive surface to enable
20 wireless communications between the process device and a
 control system.

19. The method of claim 18, further comprising:

25 enclosing the antenna in a non-metallic cover that environmentally
 protects the antenna and that allows wireless signals to pass
 through the cover to the control system.

20. The method of claim 18, further comprising:

 reducing a width and increasing a length of the wireless communications
 module such that the length is greater than the width.

21. A process device wireless adapter comprising:

a wireless communications module configured to communicatively couple to a process device and to a wireless receiver;

a metallic housing that surrounds the wireless communications module,

5 the metallic housing having a first end and a second end, the first end configured to attach to the process device;

a printed circuit board within the metallic housing, the printed circuit board having a width and a length, the length of the printed circuit board running along the length of the metallic housing, the
10 length of the printed circuit board being greater than the width of the printed circuit board, the printed circuit board configured to be communicatively coupled to a process device; and

an antenna communicatively coupled to the wireless communications module and separated from the wireless communications module.