Statically Detecting Likely Buffer Overflow Vulnerabilities

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Supported by USENIX Student Grant and NASA LRC

16 August 2001

Why aren’t we better off than we were 13 years ago?

• Ignorance
• C is difficult to use securely
  - Unsafe functions
  - Confusing APIs
• Even security aware programmers make mistakes.
• Security Knowledge has not been codified into the development process

Automated Tools

• Run-time solutions
  - StackGuard[USENIX 7], gcc bounds-checking, libsafe[USENIX 2000]
  - Performance penalty
  - Turns buffer overflow into a DoS attack
• Compile-time solutions - static analysis
  - No run-time performance penalty
  - Checks properties of all possible executions

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1988: Morris worm exploits buffer overflows in fingerd to infect 6,000 servers
2001: Code Red exploits buffer overflows in IIS to infect 250,000 servers
  - Single largest cause of vulnerabilities in CERT advisories
  - Buffer overflow threatens Internet: WSJ(1/30/01)

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Design Goals

- Tool that can be used by typical programmers as part of the development process
  - Fast, Easy to Use
- Tool that can be used to check legacy code
  - Handles typical C programs
- Encourage a proactive security methodology
  - Document key assumptions

Our approach

- Document assumptions about buffer sizes
  - Semantic comments
  - Provide annotated standard library
  - Allow user's to annotate their code
- Find inconsistencies between code and assumptions
- Make compromises to get useful checking
  - Use simplifying assumptions to improve efficiency
  - Use heuristics to analyze common loop idioms
  - Accept some false positives and false negatives (unsound and incomplete analysis)

Implementation

- Extended LCLint
  - Open source checking tool [FSE ‘94] [PLDI ‘96]
  - Uses annotations
  - Detects null dereferences, memory leaks, etc.
- Integrated to take advantage of existing checking and annotations (e.g., modifies)
- Added new annotations and checking for buffer sizes

Annotations

- requires, ensures
- maxSet
  - highest index that can be safely written to
- maxRead
  - highest index that can be safely read
- char buffer[100];
  - ensures maxSet(buffer) == 99
SecurityFocus.com Example
char *strcat (char *s1, char *s2, size_t n)
/*@requires maxSet(s1)
>=maxRead(s1) + n@*/
void func(char *str){
    char buffer[256];
    strcat(buffer, str, sizeof(buffer) - 1);
    return;
}  // uninitialized array
Source: Secure Programming working document, SecurityFocus.com

Warning Reported
char * strcat (char *s1, char *s2, size_t n)
/*@requires maxSet(s1) >= maxRead(s1) + n@*/
char buffer[256];
strcat(buffer, str, sizeof(buffer) - 1);
strncat.c:4:21: Possible out-of-bounds store:
strcat(buffer, str, sizeof(buffer) - 1);
Unable to resolve constraint:
requires maxRead (buffer @ strncat.c:4:29) <= 0
needed to satisfy precondition:
requires maxSet (buffer @ strncat.c:4:29)
>= maxRead (buffer @ strncat.c:4:29) + 255
derived from strncat precondition:
requires maxSet (<parameter 1>)
>= maxRead (<parameter1>) + <parameter 3>

Overview of checking
• Intraprocedural
  – But use annotations on called procedures and
global variables to check calls, entry, exit points
• Expressions generate constraints
  – C semantics, annotations
• Axiomatic semantics propagates constraints
• Simplifying rules
  (e.g. maxRead(str+i) ==> maxRead(str) - i)
• Produce warnings for unresolved constraints

Loop Heuristics
• Recognize common loop idioms
• Use heuristics to guess number of iterations
• Analyze first and last iterations
Example:
for (init; *buf; buf++)
  – Assume maxRead(buf) iterations
  – Model first and last iterations
Case studies

- **wu-ftpd 2.5 and BIND 8.2.2p7**
  - Detected known buffer overflows
  - Unknown buffer overflows exploitable with write access to config files
- **Performance**
  - wu-ftpd: 7 seconds / 20,000 lines of code
  - BIND: 33 seconds / 40,000 lines
  - Athlon 1200 MHz

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Instances in wu-ftpd (grep)</th>
<th>LClint warnings with no annotations added</th>
<th>LClint warning with annotations added</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>strcat</code></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>strcpy</code></td>
<td>97</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>strncpy</code></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>32 writes</td>
<td>66 reads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Warnings</strong></td>
<td>220 reads</td>
<td>166 reads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

wu-ftpd vulnerability

```c
int access_ok(int msgcode) {
    char class[1024], msgfile[200];
    int limit;
    ...

    limit = acl_getlimit(class, msgfile);
    ...
```

Related Work

- **Lexical analysis**
  - grep, its4, RATS, FlawFinder
- **Wagner, Foster, Brewer [NDSSS ‘00]**
  - Integer range constraints
  - Flow insensitive analysis
- **Dor, Rodeh and Sagiv [SAS ‘01]**
  - Source-to-source transformation with asserts and additional variables.
Impediments to wide spread adoption

- People are lazy
- Programmers are especially lazy
- Adding annotations is too much work (except for security weenies)
- Working on techniques for automating the annotation process

Conclusion

- 2014: ???
  - Will buffer overflows still be common?
  - Codify security knowledge in tools real programmers can use

Beta version now available:  
http://lclint.cs.virginia.edu

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