Web security

Web Session Management

Acknowledgments: Lecture slides are from the Computer Security course taught by Dan Boneh and John Mitchell at Stanford University. When slides are obtained from other sources, a reference will be noted on the bottom of that slide. A full list of references is provided on the last slide.
Recap: Web attacker model

Web attacker: (simplified)
Attacker origin tries to disrupt another origin, or see its data.
Both running in a correct browser.

Why is this hard to prevent?
The Web is a hodgepodge of technologies, often with conflicting security policies.
Recap: same origin policy

Review: Same Origin Policy (SOP) for DOM:

– Origin A can access origin B’s DOM if match on
  (scheme, domain, port)

Review: Same Original Policy (SOP) for cookies:

– Based on: ([scheme], domain, path)

optional

scheme://domain:port/path?params
Setting/deleting cookies by server

Default scope is domain and path of setting URL

Browser

GET ...

HTTP Header:

Set-cookie: NAME=VALUE ;

domain = (when to send) ;
path = (when to send) ;
secure = (only send over HTTPS) ;
expires = (when expires) ;
HttpOnly ;
SameSite = [lax | strict]

Server

if expires=NULL:
  this session only

if expires=past date:
  browser deletes cookie

weak XSS defense

weak CSRF defense
Remember: Cookies have no integrity

User can change and delete cookie values
  • Edit cookie database (FF: cookies.sqlite)
  • Modify Cookie header (FF: TamperData extension)

Silly example: shopping cart software

Set-cookie: shopping-cart-total = 150 ($)

User edits cookie file (cookie poisoning):
  Cookie: shopping-cart-total = 15 ($)

Similar problem with localStorage and hidden fields:

<INPUT TYPE="hidden" NAME=price VALUE="150">
Solution: cryptographic checksums

Goal: data integrity

Requires server-side secret key $k$ unknown to browser

**Generate tag:** $T \leftarrow \text{MACsign}(k, (\text{SID}, \text{name}, \text{value}))$

**Verify tag:** $\text{MACverify}(k, (\text{SID}, \text{name}, \text{value}), T)$

Binding to session-id (SID) makes it harder to replay old cookies
Example: ASP.NET

– Secret web server key intended for cookie protection

Creating an encrypted cookie with integrity:

```csharp
HttpCookie cookie = new HttpCookie(name, val);
HttpCookie encodedCookie = HttpSecureCookie.Encode (cookie);
```

Decrypting and validating an encrypted cookie:

```csharp
HttpSecureCookie.Decode (cookie);
```
Clickjacking Attacks
Framing: one site can frame another

<iframe name="myframe" src="http://www.google.com/>
This text is ignored by most browsers.
</iframe>

Can this be abused?
Clickjacking [rsnake’08]

User visits a gaming web site. Game frames Twitter site as:
(Twitter frame is occluded by game frame)
Tap-jacking attacks

User visits a gaming web site:

• Can zoom, and auto scroll

• Web site displays an incoming text message screen, but frames Twitter
Incorrect solution: framebusting

Code on a page that prevents other pages from framing

```javascript
if (top != self) { top.location = self.location; }
```
Many attacks

Example: on framing page:

```html
<script>
    window.addEventListener('beforeunload',
        function(e) {
            e.preventDefault();
        }
    )
</script>
<iframe src="http://www.paypal.com"> </iframe>

User likely to hit cancel and cancel framebusting
What the user will see
Correct defense: CSP

HTTP response from server:
HTTP/1.1 200 OK

Content-Security-Policy: frame-ancestors 'none';

<iframe src='example.com'></iframe> will cause an error

frame-ancestors ‘self’;
means only example.com can frame page
Sub Resource Integrity (SRI)
The sub-resource integrity problem

What if the sub-resource site serves bad content?
Sub-resource integrity (SRI)

SRI attribute can be added to scripts and style sheets:

```html
<script src="https://code.jquery.com/jquery-3.5.1.min.js" integrity="sha256-9/aliU8dGd2tb6OSsuzixeV4y/faTqgFtohetphbbj0=" crossorigin="anonymous">
</script>

<link rel='stylesheet' type='text/css' href='https://example.com/style.css' integrity="sha256-9/aliU8dGd2tb6OSsuzixeV4y/faTqgFtohetphbbj0=" crossorigin="anonymous">
```

integrity attribute: precomputed hash of the target sub-resource
What the browser does

```html
<script src="https://code.jquery.com/jquery-3.5.1.min.js"
integrity="sha256-9/aliU8dGd2tb6OSsuzixeV4y/faTqgFtohetphbbj0="
crossorigin="anonymous">
</script>
```

Browser: (1) load sub-resource, (2) compute hash of contents, (3) compare value to the integrity attribute.

- if hash mismatch: script or stylesheet are not executed and an error is raised.

Note: SRI is not supported on IE
Enforcing SRI using CSP

HTTP response from server:
HTTP/1.1 200 OK
...
Content-Security-Policy: require-sri-for script style;
...

Requires SRI for all scripts and style sheets on page
Interlude: Designing Security Prompts
Users are faced with a lot of challenging trust-related decisions
An example problem: IE6 mixed context

Vague threat. What’s the risk? What could happen?

“Yes”, the possibly less safe option, is the default

How should the user make this decision? No clear steps for user to follow.
Even better: load the safe content, and use the address bar to enable the rest.
Guidelines

• Philosophy:
  – Does the user have unique knowledge the system doesn’t?
  – Don’t involve user if you don’t have to
  – If you involve the user, enable them to make the right decision

• Make sure your security dialogs are NEAT:
  – *Necessary*: Can the system take action without the user? If the user has no unique knowledge, redesign system.
  – *Explained*: see next slides
  – *Actionable*: Can users make good decisions with your UI in both malicious and benign situations?
  – *Tested*: Test your dialog on a few people who haven’t used the system before -- both malicious and benign situations.
Example 1: bad explanation

IE6  CRL check failure notification

Most users will not understand “revocation information”.

Choices are unclear, consequence is unclear.
There is a problem with this website's security certificate.

The security certificate presented by this website was not issued by a trusted certificate authority.

Security certificate problems may indicate an attempt to fool you or intercept any data you send to the server.

We recommend that you close this webpage and do not continue to this website.

- Click here to close this webpage.
- Continue to this website (not recommended).

More information

- If you arrived at this page by clicking a link, check the website address in the address bar to be sure that it is the address you were expecting.
- When going to a website with an address such as https://example.com, try adding the 'www' to the address, https://www.example.com.
- If you choose to ignore this error and continue, do not enter private information into the website.

For more information, see "Certificate Errors" in Internet Explorer Help.
In Chrome (2019)

Risk

Explanation

Your connection is not private

Attackers might be trying to steal your information from expired.badssl.com (for example, passwords, messages, or credit cards). Learn more

NET::ERR_CERT_DATE_INVALID

Help improve Safe Browsing by sending some system information and page content to Google.
Privacy policy

Choices

Advanced

Back to safety
In Chrome (2019)

Process

This server could not prove that it is expired.badssl.com; its security certificate expired 1,483 days ago. This may be caused by a misconfiguration or an attacker intercepting your connection. Your computer's clock is currently set to Saturday, May 4, 2019. Does that look right? If not, you should correct your system's clock and then refresh this page.

Choice

(expired certificate)
Example 2: bad explanation

AutoPlay dialog in Vista

Attacker can abuse explanation causing bad user decisions.

Used by Conficker spread through USB drives.
A better design

Windows 7 AutoPlay removed the auto-run option
... back to Web security

Session Management and User Authentication on the Web
Sessions

A sequence of requests and responses from one browser to one (or more) sites

– Session can be long (e.g. Gmail) or short
– without session mgmt:
  users would have to constantly re-authenticate

Session mgmt: authorize user once;
– All subsequent requests are tied to user
Pre-history: HTTP auth

HTTP request: GET /index.html

HTTP response contains:

**WWW-Authenticate: Basic realm="Password Required"**

Browsers sends hashed password on all subsequent HTTP requests:

**Authorization: Basic ZGFddfibzsdfgkjheczI1NXRleHQA="**
HTTP auth problems

Hardly used in commercial sites:

• User cannot log out other than by closing browser
  – What if user has multiple accounts? multiple users on same machine?

• Site cannot customize password dialog

• Confusing dialog to users

• Easily spoofed

Do not use ...
Session tokens

Browser

GET /index.html

set anonymous session token

GET /books.html
anonymous session token

POST /do-login
Username, password, and $2^{nd}$ factor
elevate to a logged-in session token

POST /checkout
logged-in session token

web site

check credentials (crypto course)

Validate token
Storing session tokens:
Lots of options    (but none are perfect)

Browser cookie:
    Set-Cookie: SessionToken=fduhye63sfdb

Embed in all URL links:
    https://site.com/checkout ? SessionToken=kh7y3b

In a hidden form field:
    <input type="hidden" name="SessionToken" value="uydh735">
Storing session tokens: problems

Browser cookie: browser sends cookie with every request, even when it should not (CSRF) [note: SameSite attribute]

Embed in all URL links: token leaks via HTTP \texttt{Referer} header (or if user posts URL in a public blog)

In a hidden form field: does not work for long-lived sessions

Best answer: a combination of all of the above

Supported in most frameworks

PHP ex: \texttt{output\_add\_rewrite\_var(name, value)}
The HTTP referer header

GET /wiki/John_Ousterhout HTTP/1.1
Host: en.wikipedia.org
Keep-Alive: 300
Connection: keep-alive
Referer: http://www.google.com/search?q=john+ousterhout&ie=utf-8&oe...

Referer leaks URL session token to 3rd parties

**Referer supression:**
- not sent when HTTPS site refers to an HTTP site
- in HTML5:  `<a rel="noreferrer" href=www.example.com>`
The Logout Process

Web sites must provide a logout function:
• Functionality: let user to login as different user
• Security: prevent others from abusing account

What happens during logout:
1. Delete SessionToken from client
2. Mark session token as expired on server

Problem: many web sites do (1) but not (2) !!
⇒ Especially risky for sites who use HTTP after login
The Logout Process (cont.)

What if a user suspects their machine is compromised?
– Logging in from an untrusted machine  (Internet Café), or
– Malware infection of user’s machine

Site must show all devices currently logged into user’s account
– Let user terminate any unrecognized device
⇒ mark terminated session token as expired on server
Session hijacking
Session hijacking

Attacker waits for user to login
then attacker steals user’s Session Token
and “hijacks” session

→ attacker can issue arbitrary requests on behalf of user

Example: FireSheep
Firefox extension: hijacks HTTP session tokens over WiFi
Solution: always send session tokens over HTTPS!
Beware: Predictable tokens

Example 1: counter
⇒ user logs in, gets counter value,
    can view sessions of other users

Example 2: weak MAC. token = \{ userid, MAC_k(userid) \}
• Weak MAC exposes k from few cookies.

Apache Tomcat: generateSessionId()
• Returns random session ID [server retrieves client state based on sess-id]
Session tokens must be unpredictable to attacker.

To generate: use underlying framework (e.g. ASP, Tomcat, Rails)

Rails: token = SHA256( current time, random nonce )
Beware: Session token theft

Example 1: use of HTTP after login over HTTPS
• Enables cookie theft at WiFi access point (e.g. Firesheep)
• Other ways network attacker can steal token:
  – Site has mixed HTTPS/HTTP pages $\Rightarrow$ token sent over HTTP
  – Man-in-the-middle attacks on SSL

Example 2: Cross Site Scripting (XSS) exploits

Amplified by poor logout procedures:
  – Logout must invalidate token on server
Mitigating SessionToken theft by binding SessionToken to client’s computer

A common idea: embed machine specific data in SID

**Client IP addr:** makes it harder to use token at another machine
  - But honest client may change IP addr during session
    * client will be logged out for no reason

**Client user agent:** weak defense against theft, but doesn’t hurt.

**TLS session id:** same problem as IP address (and even worse)
Session fixation attacks

Suppose attacker can set the user’s session token:
• For URL tokens, trick user into clicking on URL
• For cookie tokens, set using XSS exploits

Attack:  (say, using URL tokens)
1. Attacker gets anonymous session token for site.com
2. Sends URL to user with attacker’s session token
3. User clicks on URL and logs into site.com
   – this elevates attacker’s token to logged-in token
4. Attacker uses elevated token to hijack user’s session.
Session fixation: lesson

When elevating user from anonymous to logged-in:

**always issue a new session token**

(e.g. in PHP by calling `session_regenerate_id()` in PHP)

After login, token changes to value unknown to attacker

⇒ Attacker’s token is not elevated.
Summary

• Session tokens are split across multiple client state mechanisms:
  – Cookies, hidden form fields, URL parameters
  – Cookies by themselves are insecure (CSRF, cookie overwrite)
  – Session tokens must be unpredictable and resist theft by network attacker

• Ensure logout and timeout invalidates session on server