The Role of Static Analysis in Hardening Open Source Intrusion Detection Systems

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Abstract

When deploying an open source Intrusion Detection System (IDS) into a network, it is critical to harden it against attackers. An IDS is designed to detect attacks instead of inadvertently enabling them. One approach to assist in this effort is to use static code analysis on the source code of the IDS. This paper details how to use Coverity’s static analysis tools on the Security Onion distribution to find security vulnerabilities. A look at Coverity’s security code checkers, with a focus toward UNINIT, BUFFER_SIZE, and USE_AFTER_FREE is discussed.
1. Introduction

Intrusion analysts use the principles of network security monitoring (NSM) to help secure computer systems. NSM is “the collection, analysis and escalation of indications and warnings to detect and respond to intrusions” (Bejtlich, 2013). NSM core functions include intrusion detection systems (IDS), network based IDS (NIDS), host intrusion detection systems (HIDS), and physical intrusion detection systems (Physical IDS) (Berge, n.d). Analysts should evaluate software packages such as IDS and HIDS before deploying them.

There are many different ways to determine how secure a given software package is. One way is to use Aberlarde's security systems engineering approach (Abelarde, 2016). This approach details how commercial and open source software packages are evaluated at each phase of the software development life cycle (SDLC) to determine their security profiles. An advantage of examining open source software is direct access to the code. With direct access, developers can use techniques such as code inspection and static code analysis.

Static code analysis (SCA) is a way of finding issues in software without executing it. The SCA tool accomplishes this by emulating the execution of the different branches of the code by using possible input data. The SCA tool reveals both quality issues (e.g. COPY_PASTE_ERROR, FORWARD_NULL, INCOMPATIBLE_CAST) and security issues (e.g. UNINIT, BUFFER_SIZE, and USE_AFTER_FREE). The SCA tool also shows specific fixes the developer can apply to the source code to reduce the software's defect density. It calculates defect density by dividing the number of defects by the size of the component (usually specified in lines of code). In 2014, the average defect density for open source software was 0.61 per thousand lines of code or KLOC. In contrast, commercial software's defect density was 0.76 per KLOC (Coverity, 2014).

There are many static analysis tools to choose from (OWASP, 2016). Coverity has been gaining popularity in the last ten years after the Coverity Scan service was made available (Coverity, 2016). Coverity Scan allows open source developers a way to submit their code to Coverity’s cloud-based service for analysis and examine the results free of charge. Coverity also offers the same analysis tools in a commercial product that can be...
deployed locally in their customer’s environment. This paper demonstrates how Coverity’s static code analysis can be used in both deployment scenarios to scan some of the software packages that make up the Security Onion distribution.

2. Security Onion

Security Onion is a Linux distribution maintained by Doug Burks that includes full packet capture, NIDS, HIDS, and a set of analysis tools (Burks, n.d.). Those tools include:

- netsniff-ng for full-packet capture
- Snort, Suricata and Bro for NIDS
- OSSEC for HIDS
- Sguil, Squert, Snorby, and ELSA, for data analysis

Using the Security Onion distribution saves time when compared with configuring each of the tools separately. Before starting development with this distribution, step-by-step instructions for installing, configuring, and updating Security Onion should be followed (Burks, 2016). Once that is complete, the developer can examine the source code of the Security Onion software packages to look for security vulnerabilities.

3. Coverity Scan

The first deployment option for Coverity is Coverity Scan. Coverity Scan is a cloud service where registered open source developers upload their source code for analysis. The Coverity static analysis engine then executes against that source code. Developers review the reported issues, follow the advice to fix the issues, and then resubmit the source code. Coverity Scan is free to the open source community.

3.1. Coverity Scan Overview

Coverity Scan started in 2006 as a project funded by the Department of Homeland Security. The main mission was to improve the quality of open source software that the
nation was beginning to use. The funding lasted three years until 2009 when Coverity took full ownership of the project (J. Croall, personal interview, January 21, 2016).

The Linux operating system was one of the original Coverity Scan users. Currently, there just under 7,000 projects with over 15,000 individual users using Coverity Scan. Some of the projects include Python, OpenSSL, PHP as well as packages found in Security Onion like Snort, Bro, and Wireshark. To prevent overloading the servers, Coverity Scan limits the number of uploads on projects with large codebases. Developers are permitted to submit up to three builds a day and twelve builds per week if their software package has less than 100,000 lines of code (Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). To help increase the security profile of one of the projects, developers request contributor access from the maintainers.

3.2. Coverity Scan Example: Wireshark

Developers follow a four-step process when using Coverity Scan: build; analyze; commit defects; and review results. For the build step, pass the native build command as an argument to Coverity’s command line cov-build tool. Cov-build instruments the native build and stores the information in the intermediate directory specified with the --dir flag. Using Wireshark as an example, the Coverity compile command would be:

```bash
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 \ 
--dir ~/cov-inter-wireshark make
```

For the analysis step, upload the intermediate directory to Coverity Scan manually or with a continuous integration system (i.e. Travis-CI). Code analysis is performed on the Coverity servers as opposed to locally on the developer's system. For the commit defects step, Coverity handles this automatically. To review the results, log on to the Coverity Connect web interface where the defects are shown inline with the source code. Section 5 below details this process.

The Wireshark project is an active user of Coverity Scan. They have fixed thousands of defects since 2006 and have a very low defect density of 0.26 per KLOC as
shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Coverity Scan: Wireshark

(http://scan.coverity.com/projects/wireshark)

4. Coverity Local Analysis

In contrast to Coverity Scan's cloud service, developers can choose to purchase Coverity's commercial offering. The commercial offering runs locally on their network. A standard Coverity deployment uses two machines in a client/server architecture.

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Security Onion is the local development machine and acts as the client which sends the results to the Coverity database server. By default, Security Onion's software packages are installed as executables. Developers must compile and analyze the corresponding source code by downloading it first. Appendix A lists each of the commands to install Coverity, the GCC compiler, and the source code of the software under investigation. Developers execute the code analysis on the client machine rather than using Coverity Scan's servers. The database that stores the results is on a local network instead of on a Coverity Scan server. Browsing the results is done by logging into the Coverity web server and selecting the appropriate project (i.e. Wireshark) as shown in Figure 2.

![Coverity Project Menu](image)

*Figure 2: Coverity Project Menu*

Once a project is selected, select the Coverity Menu (the three-line icon) and choose “Outstanding Security Risks” as shown in Figure 3.
This view filters all of the Coverity defects into a smaller list that only includes the security issues. The examples in the next section use this filter.

5. Fixing Security Vulnerabilities

Before fixing the code, let's examine how the “do no harm rule” can be applied to software as well as how compiler warnings fit into the static analysis picture.

5.1. Do No Harm

“Learning to write clean code is hard work” (Martin 2009). In the beginning, source code can be elegant, but as time passes it can become “increasingly sucky” (Skorkin, 2010). Reading source code that one did not write is a critical part of being a good developer. For intrusion analysts who might not be as familiar with reading and writing code, it can be a daunting task.
“The Boy Scouts of America have a simple rule that we can apply to our profession. Leave the campground cleaner than you found it. If we all checked-in our code a little cleaner than when we checked it out, the code simply could not rot” (Martin, 2009).

There are two benefits to the “do no harm rule”: developers improve their coding skills; and the original authors will appreciate the responsible disclosure (Hughes, 2015).

5.2. **Compiler Warnings**

Another aspect of static code analysis is compiler warnings. Getting code to compile is a mini-celebration in itself, so compiler warnings are often ignored. Taking an example from the daq-2.0.6 package, line 859 of daq_afpacket.c declares the variable `rc`:

```c
int rc;
```

Line 866 contains:

```c
rc = send(instance->peer->fd, NULL, 0, 0);
```

The compiler warning is:

```
daq_afpacket.c:859:25: warning: variable ‘rc’ set but not used
 [-Wunused-but-set-variable]
   ^
```

The compiler is informing the developer that the return value from the call to `send()` is set in the variable `rc`, but `rc` is not used later in the function. One fix would be to delete line 859 and change line 866 to:

```c
(void) send(instance->peer->fd, NULL, 0, 0);
```

This change silences the compiler warning and keeps the code change as close to the original as possible. By assigning the return value from the `send()` call to `(void)`, the code is ignoring it as it does currently. Another possible fix is to add additional code after line 866, to check `rc` against all of the return values. That fix changes the program execution and should be reviewed by the maintainers.

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Compilers also have the ability to “treat warnings as errors”. Turning on this feature, is a good way to introduce a level of coding discipline in a phased approach to the project. Developers can turn on one warning at a time, fix each one, and then turn on additional warnings when time permits. On Adobe Photoshop, the compilers have the option “treat warnings as errors” turned on which forces a higher level of awareness amongst the team. The continuous build system fails the build with newly introduced compiler warnings. If the build fails, the team fixes the errors quickly. Another reason to turn on “treat warnings as errors”, is to minimize static analysis defects. It is better to eliminate them from the code with the compiler’s help before adding another tool.

5.3. Coverity Security Checkers

Coverity 7.7 has over seventy checkers that apply to C and C++ and of these, eighteen focus on security issues. This section focuses on UNINIT, BUFFER_SIZE, and USE_AFTER_FREE.

5.3.1. UNINIT

In ANSI C, the “initial contents of a variable are undefined” (Roberts, 1997). Because the language allows the definition of variables without initialization, there is often a large amount of C code that doesn’t explicitly initialize variables. Some of that code immediately fill the variable after its declaration, so initialization does happen. Sometimes the compiler sets it to zero automatically. Because developers have to remember these rules, there is room for security issues to enter the software. Although there have been proposals to fix this for the C language, for now, developers need to remember the rules (Myers, 2015).

One way to eliminate these issues is to use Coverity’s security checker UNINIT. UNINIT looks for uninitialized stack variables and dynamically allocated memory on the heap that could lead to crashes or security issues. Line 222 of sf_bpf_filter.c in the daq-
2.0.6 package declares an array of int32’s called mem.

```c
DAQ_SO_PUBLIC u_int bpf_filter(pc, p, wirelen, buflen)
          register const struct bpf_insn *pc;
          register const u_char *p;
          u_int wirelen;
          register u_int buflen;
          {
            register u_int32 A, X;
            register int k;
            1. var_decl: Declaring variable mem without initializer.
            int32 mem[BPF_MEMWORDS];
```

Figure 4: mem declaration

Line 406 uses mem in a condition where it was not initialized.

```c
125. Continuing loop
        continue;
        case BPF_LDX | BPF_IMM:
            X = pc->k;
            continue;
        case BPF_LD | BPF_MEM:
            C1D 15144 (#2 of 2): Uninitialized scalar variable (UNINIT)
            128. uninit_use: Using uninitialized value mem[pc->k].
            A = mem[pc->k];
            continue;
```

Figure 5: mem assignment

Coverity simulated running through the loop exercising all code paths, as shown in the green text. The simulation found that in at least one condition, the variable mem was assigned to variable A before initialization. To fix this issue, explicitly zero-initialize the array in line 222 as follows.

```c
int32 mem[BPF_MEMWORDS] = {0};
```

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5.3.2. BUFFER_SIZE

According to Michael Howard and David LeBlanc’s *Writing Secure Code*, “buffer overruns that lead to a security patch can cost up to $100,000” (Howard, 2003). Coverity’s security checker BUFFER_SIZE helps developers find and fix defects that involve buffers in their C/C++ code. Taking an example from the snort-2.9.8.0 package, line 962 of encode.c initializes the variable *next* of type PROTO_ID to PROTO_MAX. PROTO_MAX is the last element of the PROTO_ID enum defined as:

```c
typedef enum {
    PROTO_TCP,
    PROTO_UDP,
    ...
    PROTO_MAX
} PROTO_ID;
```

Line 960 defines the function UDP_Encode as shown in Figure 6.
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Figure 6: out-of-bounds read example

The green text shows which execution path Coverity used. The value returned from the NextEncoder function is stored in next which is of type PROTO_ID. There is a case where the returned value could be PROTO_MAX, or 22, which is the last element of the enum. Line 992 indexes into the encoders array at the position specified in next which is one past the end of the array because array indexing starts at 0 instead of 1. To prevent this possible buffer overrun, wrap line 992 in an if/else statement to check that next is less than PROTO_MAX before it is used to index into the encoders array:

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5.3.3. USE_AFTER_FREE

Defining variables reserves a place in memory for them. When the program explicitly frees the memory, developers need to ensure there are no cases where the memory is used after it is freed. Using memory in this way can lead to unpredictable results and possible exploitation.

One way to eliminate these issues is to use Coverity's security checker USE_AFTER_FREE. Taking an example from the netsniff-ng-0.6.0 package, line 304 of curvetun_client.c declares a pointer to a structure called ahead as shown in Figure 7.

![Code snippet from curvetun_client.c](image-url)

Figure 7: netsniff-ng - ahead declaration
Line 339 assigns the `ahead` pointer to `ai` as shown in Figure 8.

```c
for (ai = ahead; ai != NULL && ai->next != NULL; ai = ai->next) {
    fd = socket(ai->family, ai->protocol);
    if (fd < 0)
        goto retry;
```

Figure 8: `ahead` pointer assignment

Coverity found in line 358 the `ahead` pointer was freed. The `goto` statement at line 367 jumps program execution back to line 311. The next time through the loop at line 339, the pointer was assigned to `ai` without first checking the pointer for NULL. To fix the issue, add the following line of code after line 358 to set the pointer to NULL.

```
ahead = NULL;
```
6. Responsible Disclosure

After fixing vulnerabilities, developers have an ethical responsibility to disclose the issues back to the maintainers of the code. For projects like Wireshark that use GitHub, fixes are submitted with a “git push” command by following the project documentation (Wireshark Developer's Guide, 2014). Other projects have mailing lists or defect tracking systems to submit the fixes.

7. Future Work

In January 2016, Coverity released version 8.0 of its static analysis tools. One of the major new features was the ability to analyze Python code. Security Onion contains a packet manipulation tool called Scapy. Scapy is gaining in popularity especially as intrusion analysts investigate devices that make up the Internet of Things (The 2015 SANS Holiday Hack Challenge, 2015). A future project could examine the static code analysis results of Scapy.

8. Conclusion

Hardening computer networks with an open source IDS requires the intrusion analyst understand the security profile of the software packages on the system. By utilizing static code analysis on the software that makes up the IDS, the analyst has a better understanding of the security profile the open source software provides. John Carmack, the co-founder of id Software, stated:

“The most important thing I have done as a programmer in recent years is to aggressively pursue static code analysis” (Carmack, 2011).

Taking the advice from one the most famous software developers allows the intrusion analyst to utilize some of the best practices from software developers.
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References


About Coverity Scan. (n.d.). Retrieved February 08, 2016, from https://scan.coverity.com/about


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Appendix A
Integrating Coverity 7.7 with Security Onion 14.04.3.1

Prerequisites: Install Security Onion 14.04.3.1 per the steps at: https://github.com/Security-Onion-Solutions/security-onion/wiki/QuickISOImage

Ensure you have a minimum of 8GB of RAM and a 40GB hard drive

/* Install development tools, install updates and reboot */
$ sudo apt-get install build-essential
$ sudo apt-get update
$ sudo apt-get dist-upgrade
$ sudo reboot

/* Download source code in .tar.gz format with a web browser to */
~/Downloads with their default names*/
bro-2.4.1.tar.gz
daq-2.0.6.tar.gz
netsniff-ng-0.6.0.tar.gz
ossec-hids-2.8.2.tar.gz
snort-2.9.8.0.tar.gz
suricata-3.0.tar.gz
wireshark-2.0.1.tar.bz2

/* Download Coverity and the license file with a web browser to */
~/Downloads with their default names*/
cov-analysis-linux64-7.7.0.tar.gz
license.bat

/* Download and Install Coverity at root of user’s home directory */
$ cd ~
$ mv ~/Downloads/cov-analysis-linux64-7.7.0.tar.gz .
$ tar xvfz cov-analysis-linux64-7.7.0.tar.gz

/* Install license file to Coverity bin directory */
$ cp ~/Downloads/license.dat ~/cov-analysis-linux64-7.7.0/bin

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/* edit user's .bashrc to update path to include Coverity binaries
   replace "username" with your username */
$ export PATH="$PATH:/home/username/cov-analysis-linux64-7.7.0/bin"
$ . ~/.bashrc

/* BRO --------------------------------------------------------------*/

/* Install prerequisites for Bro */
$ sudo apt-get install python-dev swig

/* Configure and compile Bro with Coverity */
$ cd ~/src
$ cp ~/Downloads/bro-2.4.1.tar.gz .
$ tar xvfz bro-2.4.1.tar.gz
$ cd bro-2.4.1/
$ ./configure
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 --dir ~/cov-inter-bro make

/* Confirm Coverity returns "compilation units (100%)" then
   analyze Bro with all of the Coverity checkers */
$ cov-analyze --dir ~/cov-inter-bro --all --enable-callgraph-metrics

/* Commit defects to Coverity stream "bro-mainline"
   replace "username" with your Coverity username and "myserver.com"
   with your Coverity database server */
$ cov-commit-defects --host myserver.com --dataport 9090 "
   --stream bro-mainline --dir ~/cov-inter-bro --user username

/* DAQ --------------------------------------------------------------*/

/* Configure and compile DAQ with Coverity */
$ cp ~/Downloads/daq-2.0.6.tar.gz .
$ tar -xvzf daq-2.0.6.tar.gz
$ cd ~/src/daq-2.0.6/
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 --dir ~/cov-inter-daq/ make

/* Confirm Coverity returns "compilation units (100%)" then
   analyze DAQ with all of the Coverity checkers */
$ cov-analyze --dir ~/cov-inter-daq/ --all --enable-callgraph-metrics

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/* Commit defects to Coverity stream “daq-mainline” replace “username” with your Coverity username and “myserver.com” with your Coverity database server */
$ cov-commit-defects --host myserver.com --dataport 9090 \
  --stream daq-mainline --dir ~/cov-inter-daq/ --user username

/* netsniff-ng ---------------------------------------------------------------*/

/* Install prerequisites for netsniff-ng */
$ sudo apt-get install ccache flex bison libnl-3-dev \libnl-3-dev libnl-genl-3-dev libnl-route-3-dev libgeoip-dev \libnetfilter-contrack-dev libncurses5-dev libruncu-dev \libnacl-dev libpcap-dev zlib1g-dev libcli-dev libnet1-dev

/* Configure and compile netsniff-ng with Coverity */
$ cd ~/src
$ cp ~/Downloads/netsniff-ng-0.6.0.tar.gz .
$ tar xvfz netsniff-ng-0.6.0.tar.gz
$ cd netsniff-ng-0.6.0/
$ ./configure
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 --dir ~/cov-inter-netsniff-ng make

/* Confirm Coverity returns “compilation units (100%)” then analyze netsniff-ng with all of the Coverity checkers */
$ cov-analyze --dir ~/cov-inter-netsniff-ng --all \--enable-callgraph-metrics

/* Commit defects to Coverity stream “netsniff-ng-mainline” replace “username” with your Coverity username and “myserver.com” with your Coverity database server */
$ cov-commit-defects --host myserver.com --dataport 9090 \
  --stream netsniff-ng-mainline --dir \~/cov-inter-netsniff-ng --user username

/* ossec-hids ---------------------------------------------------------------*/

/* Configure and compile ossec-hids with Coverity */
$ cd ~/src
$ cp ~/Downloads/ossec-hids-2.8.2.tar.gz .
$ tar xvfz ossec-hids-2.8.2.tar.gz

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$ cd ossec-hids-2.8.2/
$ cd src
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 --dir ~/cov-inter-ossec make all

/* Confirm Coverity returns “compilation units (100%)” then analyze ossec-hids with all of the Coverity checkers */
$ cov-analyze --dir ~/cov-inter-ossec --all --enable-callgraph-metrics

/* Commit defects to Coverity stream “ossec-mainline” */
replace “username” with your Coverity username and “myserver.com” with your Coverity database server */
$ cov-commit-defects --host myserver.com --dataport 9090 \
   --stream ossec-mainline --dir ~/cov-inter-ossec --user username

/* snort ----------------------------------------------------------*/

/* Install required prerequisites for snort */
$ sudo apt-get install libpcap-dev libpcre3-dev libdumbnet-dev \
   bison flex

/* Install optional prerequisites (adds Adobe Flash support) */
$ sudo apt-get install liblzma-dev libnuma-dev

/* Configure and compile snort with Coverity */
$ cd ~/src
$ cp ~/Downloads/snort-2.9.8.0.tar.gz .
$ tar -xvzf snort-2.9.8.0.tar.gz
$ cd snort-2.9.8.0
$ ./configure
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 --dir ~/cov-inter-snort2/ make

/* Confirm Coverity returns “compilation units (100%)” then analyze snort with all of the Coverity checkers */
$ cov-analyze --dir ~/cov-inter-snort2/ --all \
   --enable-callgraph-metrics

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/* Commit defects to Coverity stream “snort2-mainline” */
replace “username” with your Coverity username and “myserver.com” with your Coverity database server */
$ cov-commit-defects --host myserver.com --dataport 9090 \
   --stream snort2-mainline --dir ~/cov-inter-snort2/ --user username

/* Suricata ---------------------------------------------------------*/

/* Install prerequisites for Suricata */
$ sudo apt-get install libyaml-dev libcap-ng-dev libmagic-dev

/* Configure and compile Suricata with Coverity */
$ cd ~/src
$ cp ~/Downloads/suricata-3.0.tar.gz .
$ tar xvfz suricata-3.0.tar.gz
$ cd suricata-3.0/
$ ./configure
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 --dir ~/cov-inter-suricata make

/* Confirm Coverity returns “compilation units (100%)” then analyze Suricata with all of the Coverity checkers */
$ cov-analyze --dir ~/cov-inter-suricata --all \
   --enable-callgraph-metrics

/* Commit defects to Coverity stream “suricata-mainline” */
replace “username” with your Coverity username and “myserver.com” with your Coverity database server */
$ cov-commit-defects --host myserver.com --dataport 9090 \
   --stream suricata-mainline --dir ~/cov-inter-suricata --user username

/* Wireshark ---------------------------------------------------------*/

/* Install prerequisites for Wireshark */
$ sudo apt-get install qt-sdk libgtk-3-dev

/* Configure and compile Wireshark with Coverity */
$ cd ~/src
$ cp ~/Downloads/wireshark-2.0.1.tar.bz2 .
$ bunzip2 wireshark-2.0.1.tar.bz2

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$ tar xvf wireshark-2.0.1.tar
$ cd wireshark-2.0.1/
$ ./configure
$ cov-build --encoding UTF-8 --dir ~/cov-inter-wireshark make

/* Confirm Coverity returns “compilation units (100%)” then
  analyze Wireshark with all of the Coverity checkers */
$ cov-analyze --dir ~/cov-inter-wireshark --all \
  --enable-callgraph-metrics

/* Commit defects to Coverity stream “wireshark-mainline”
  replace “username” with your Coverity username and “myserver.com”
  with your Coverity database server */
$ cov-commit-defects -host myserver.com --dataport 9090 \
  --stream wireshark-mainline --dir ~/cov-inter-wireshark \
  --user username
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