• A large number of software vulnerabilities
  – various types of buffer overflows
  – input injection attacks
  – integer overflow
  – format string problems
  – interaction with environment variables
  – race conditions

• What can we do to improve software security?
Overview

- Defensive programming: what it is and how it is useful
- How can we make software safer?
  - handling program input
  - writing safe code
  - interacting with the environment
  - handling program output
Defensive Programming

- **Defensive programming** is the practice of defensive software design to ensure that the software performs as expected in adversarial environment
  - the goal is to ensure correct operation in face of unanticipated usage of the software
  - main difference between normal practices and defensive programming is that nothing is assumed
  - any assumptions about the input and interaction with other components of the system are made explicit
    - user input, file contents, network data, database contents, environment variables, libraries, etc.
    - e.g., it is not assumed that function or library calls outside of the program will work as advertised
Defensive Programming

- Defensive programming (cont.)
  - all assumptions are validated and handled in the code
  - all error states are accounted for

- How can it be achieved?
  - assumption validation is performed for the same components as before
    - checking of input and program parameters
    - validation of environment variables, interaction with operating system, etc.
Defensive Programming

- Software security should be a design goal addressed from the start of program development
  - if it’s not, the resulting program is unlikely to be secure
  - any assumptions made about the input and/or the environment must be validated in the program
  - any time changes are made to a secure program, the assumptions need to be revisited
  - the need for secure software is not sufficiently recognized
    - time pressure, insufficient funding
- Regular testing techniques won’t identify many vulnerabilities triggered by unusual inputs
• **Input handling**
  
  – input size, input interpretation, input syntax
  
  – examples
    
    • program arguments cannot be trusted including the program name itself
    
    • program arguments cannot be assumed to be shorter than the maximum length of a command line in shell
  
  – several languages now include function calls to aid in input validation
    
    • e.g., PHP has `mysql_real_escape_string()` that escapes special characters in its argument string for use in SQL queries
  
  – use regular expressions to validate the input
• **Input fuzzing**
  
  – is a technique for testing many potential types of abnormal inputs  
  – was introduced in 1989 to help anticipate potential problems in a program when used on adversarial inputs  
  – the main idea is to use randomly generated data as inputs to a program  
  – the range of inputs can be very large  
    • use random textual or binary inputs  
    • generate random network requests  
    • pass random parameters to functions
Input Fuzzing

- Example of input fuzzing
  - standard HTTP GET request
    - GET /index.html HTTP/1.1
  - anomalous requests
    - AAAAA...AAAA /index.html HTTP/1.1
    - GET /////////index.html HTTP/1.1
    - GET %n%n%n%n%n.html HTTP/1.1
    - GET /AAAAAAAAAAAAAAA.html HTTP/1.1
    - GET /index.html HTTTTTTTTTTTTTTP/1.1
    - GET /index.html HTTP/1.1.1.1.1.1.1
Input Fuzzing

• Regression vs. Fuzzing
  – **regression** prescribes running program on many normal inputs, looks for badness
    • the goal is to prevent normal users from encountering errors (i.e., assertions are bad)
  – **fuzzing** prescribes running program on many abnormal inputs, looks for badness
    • the goal is to prevent attackers from encountering exploitable errors (i.e., assertions are often ok)

• There are several types of fuzzing
  – black-box fuzz testing
  – constraint-based automatic test case generation
Input Fuzzing

- **Black box fuzz testing**
  - given a program, simply feed it random inputs to see whether it would crash
  - advantages: really easy
  - disadvantages: inefficient
    - only a very small fraction of inputs triggers a crash, probability of running across them might be low
    - input often requires structure, random inputs are likely to be malformed
  - enhancements to the basic approach exist
    - mutation based fuzzing, generation based fuzzing
• Mutation-based black-box fuzzing
  – take a well-formed input, randomly perturb it (by flipping bits, etc.)
  – little or no knowledge of input structure is assumed
  – introduced anomalies can be completely random or follow some heuristics
    • e.g., remove NULL, shift characters, etc.
  – existing tools
    • ZZUF (http://caca.zoy.org/wiki/zzuf) is very successful in finding bugs in real-world programs
    • Taof, GPF, ProxyFuzz, FileFuzz, etc.
Input Fuzzing

• Example: fuzzing a PDF viewer
  – Google for .pdf (about a billion results)
  – crawl pages to build a corpus
  – use a fuzzing tool or script to take a file and mutate it
    • feed the file to the program and records if it crashes

• Advantages
  – very easy to setup and automate, no protocol knowledge is required

• Disadvantages
  – limited by the initial corpus, may fail for protocols that use checksums, challenge-response, etc.
Input Fuzzing

- **Generation-based fuzzing**
  - test cases are generated from some description of the format
    - e.g., RFC, documentation, etc.
  - anomalies are added to each possible spot in the inputs
  - knowledge of protocol is expected to give better results than random fuzzing
  - advantages
    - completeness, can deal with complex dependencies such as checksums
  - disadvantages
    - have to have protocol specification, writing generator can be labor intensive
Input Fuzzing

- **Existing generation-based fuzzing tools**
  - generational fuzzers for common protocols (ftp, http, SNMP, etc.)
    - Mu-4000, Codenomicon, PROTOS, FTPFuzz
  - fuzzing frameworks: you provide a spec, they provide a fuzz set
    - SPIKE, Peach, Sulley
  - dumb fuzzing automated: you provide files or packet traces, they provide fuzz set
    - Filep, Taof, GPF, ProxyFuzz, PeachShark
  - special purpose fuzzers
    - ActiveX, regular expressions, and others
Input Fuzzing

- How much fuzzing is enough?
  - mutation based fuzzers are able of producing an infinite number of test cases, when has the fuzzer run long enough?
  - example
    - I have a 250KB PDF file
    - suppose the program crashes if one specific byte is changed to a particular value
    - you are expected to run hundreds of thousand tests before finding the bug, is that days?
  - code coverage can be used as a metric of how much has been covered and whether more tests are needed
    - coverage data can be obtained using profiling tools such as gcov
Input Fuzzing

- **Constraint-based automatic test case generation**
  - look inside the box: use the code itself to guide fuzzing
  - assert security/safety properties
  - explore different execution paths to check whether the security properties hold
  - challenges
    - for a given path, need to somehow check whether an input can violate the security property
    - find inputs that will go down different execution paths
• Example

```c
func(unsigned int len) {
    unsigned int s;
    char *buf;
    if (len % 2 == 0) s = len;
    else s = len + 2;
    buf = malloc(s);
    read(fd, buf, len);
    ...
```

– where is the bug?

– what is the security/safety property?

– what inputs will cause violation of the security property?

– how likely will random testing find the bug?
Input Fuzzing

- Identify all paths

```c
if len % 2 == 0
    F
    s = len + 2
    T
    s = len

assert(s >= len);
buf = malloc(s);
read(fd, buf, len);
```
Input Fuzzing

```c
if len % 2 == 0
    F
else
    T

s = len + 2          s = len

assert(s >= len);
buf = malloc(s);
read(fd, buf, len);
```

- Test `len = 8`
  - no assertion failure
  - what about all inputs that take the same path as `len = 8`?
Input Fuzzing

- **Solution: symbolic execution**
  - represent inputs (i.e., `len`) as symbolic variables
  - perform each operation on symbolic variables symbolically
  - construct a formula for a given path and give it to a solver
  - example
    - is there a value for `len` s.t.
      \[ \text{len} \mod 2 = 0 \land s = \text{len} \land s < \text{len} \]?
    - in this case the formula is not satisfiable, the solver returns no
    - this means that for any `len` that follows this path, the execution will be safe
  - symbolic execution can check many inputs at the same time
• **Symbolic execution** (cont.)
  
  – how do we check other paths?
  
  – reverse condition of the branch to go a different path
    
    • the condition becomes \( \text{len} \% 2 \neq 0 \)
    
    • the formula becomes
      
      \[
      \text{len} \% 2 \neq 0 \land s = \text{len} + 2 \land s < \text{len}
      \]
    
    – the solver returns satisfying assignment \( \text{len} = 2^{32} - 1 \)
    
    – the bug is found

• Some available tools: EXE, DART, CUTE
Correct implementation is also important to program safety

- Ensure that algorithms are appropriate
  - E.g., a strong pseudo-random number generator is used, all code used in testing has been removed, etc.
  - Search for patterns such as “fix”, “assume”, “XXX”, etc.

- Ensure that stored values are interpreted correctly
  - I.e., a memory location is interpreted according to the same data type as what was stored in that memory
  - Use pointers with caution

- Ensure correct memory usage
  - Freeing memory after use to avoid memory leaks, freeing only after the last use
Creating Safe Code

• Program interaction with the environment
  – carefully check (or don’t use) critical environment variables
  – exercise the principle of least privilege
    • use groups for escalated privileges whenever possible
    • grant only necessary privileges (e.g., to a web server)
    • partition a complex program into sub-tasks with appropriate separate privileges
  – handle access to shared resources correctly
    • use atomic operations to obtain exclusive access to a resource
    • e.g., check for a lock file by attempting to create it
Creating Safe Code

- Program interaction with the environment (cont.)
  - exercise safe temporary file use
    - use unpredictable temporary file names
    - handle file creation operation with care or use atomic operations
    - grant minimum access privileges on temporary files
  - be aware of operating system interactions and optimizations
    - securely deleting a file is an excellent example of how the program might not perform as expected due to OS optimizations
      - are the data being written to the original data blocks?
      - are the data being repeatedly written?
• **Program interaction with the environment** (cont.)
  
  – verify interaction with other programs for correctness
    
    • inputs passed from another program should not be assumed trusted (or having common origin)
    
    • check exit status of child processes
    
    • use suitable data protection for network-based communication

• **Handling program output**
  
  – use correct encoding

  – apply necessary protection
• Writing safe code is an extremely non-trivial task
  – explicitly validate all assumptions about program input and environment
  – use safe programming practices
  – use any tools and techniques for testing that resources permit
    • code review, static analysis, fuzzing, …