Global Information Assurance Certification Paper

Wireless Security and the IEEE 802.11 Standards

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Option 1 - Research on Topics
in Information Security

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The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802.11 is the working group defining a family of specifications for wireless LAN technology. The IEEE goal is to provide wireless LAN with security level equivalent to the wired LANs. The following document will focus on the security characteristics of the 802.11 standard and will examine its strengths and its weaknesses that lead to the development of new security mechanisms. Finally we will examine how the new 802.11i extension provided the necessary security improvement to the original standard.

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1. Introduction

Over the past year the demand for wireless connectivity of computing devices is rapidly increasing. This demand is pushed by customers and organizations attracted by the 'any-time/anywhere' network access capabilities, flexibility and cost effectives solutions the wireless LANs (WLAN) can provide. Market projections shows huge increases of mobile internet users over the next several years [1] and everywhere home users and corporations are deploying WLANs, extending and sometime replacing their existing wired network. To have these WLAN infrastructures and devices interoperable with each other some uniformity or standardization was required. The IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers) and other organizations addressed the need by producing specifications, standards and extensions.
If it is indisputable that WLAN technology brings mobility and flexible deployment benefits, it also has the associated drawback of a major security risk that needs to be addressed. We will see here after how IEEE organization has addressed these security issues.

2. Wireless LAN Standards – Overview

The rise of wireless systems with new applications and technologies drives countries, manufacturers and user interest groups to cooperate and develop new standards.
The main standards issued from the standardization groups are the High Performance Radio Lan (HiperLan), Home Radio Frequency (HomeRF), IEEE 802.11. These standards are focusing on the Radio Frequency (RF) wireless networking communication. Note that the standard released by these different organizations are not compatible each other.

- HiperLAN is a standard issued from the ETSI (European Telecommunications Standards Institute). The actual version defines two wireless network types, HiperLAN1 and HiperLAN2. Both are using the 5 GHz frequency band. As of today these standards have not been finalized and commercial products using this standard are not available.
- HomeRF is a wireless standard using the 2.4 GHz frequency band referred as Industrial, Scientific and Medical (ISM) unregulated band. The transmission rate is 10-Mbps within a range of up to 150 feet.

[1] SANS Security Essentials Version 2.2. Networking Concepts. Pages 257-258.

- 802.11 Direct Sequence Spread Spectrum (DSSS) is a standard for wireless LANs approved in 1997 by IEEE 802 committee, allowing a bandwidth throughput of 1-2Mbit/s. This standard offers a wireless connectivity to fix or mobile stations allowing a quick network set up in a limited zone. 802.11 support IR (Infra Red) and ISM radio frequency as transmission media. To increase throughput, the IEEE developed three 802.11's extensions (802.11b – 802.11a – 802.11g) based on new RF transmission techniques.

    - 802.11b theoretical throughput is 11 Mbps similar to the Ethernet 10baseT which is large enough to handle most bandwidth intensive application. This standard operates at 2.4GHz frequency, in the unregulated ISM band. 802.11b is compatible with 802.11 DSSS.

    - 802.11a increased the theoretical throughput up to 54 Mbps. Because it is operating in the 5 GHz frequency wavelength using the Unlicensed-National Information Infrastructure (U-NII) band, 802.11a is not compatible with 802.11 and 802.11b themselves working in the ISM band.

    - 802.11g is the standard extension that can be defined as a compromise between 802.11b and 802.11a: It offers wireless theoretical throughput up to 54 Mbps like 802.11a and because it operated in the same ISM band, is backward compatible with 802.11b. 802.11g is expected to be the most widely used standard for implementing WLAN technology.

Relationship between 802.11 And Wi-Fi:

The term Wi-Fi (Wireless-Fidelity) is a certification given by the Wi-Fi Alliance [2] to 802.11 products found to be interoperable with other Wi-Fi certified products. Founded in 1999, the initial name of the Wi-Fi Alliance was the WECA (Wireless Ethernet Compatibility Alliance). Wi-Fi alliance is an international non-profit association of 802.11 product vendors. Its goal is to promote Wi-Fi as an international standard for the wireless LAN. The Wi-Fi Alliance main focuses is the interoperability of the product issued from the IEEE 802.11b, 802.11a, 802.11g specifications. They also worked to define two new certifications: WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access) to address the critical aspects of wireless security and Wi-Fi Zone for the expanding market of wireless connectivity for travellers. WPA is not a standard but a certification given by the Wi-Fi Alliance to the product supporting security features like 802.1x for authentication and TKIP for encryption. WPA2 certification refers to products implementing the new IEEE 802.11i standard as the security feature.

After having presenting the general specifications relevant to wireless communication, the following chapters will focus on 802.11, 802.1x and 802.11i as they are the keys security standards for the wireless communication.

[2] http://www.weca.net/OpenSection/FAQ.asp?TID=2#WECA

3. 802.11 Standard and Security

To be able to secure a wireless network, the 802.11 standard includes a set of security features: Service Set Identifier (SSID) which is used to control access to an Access Point (AP), the Access Control List (ACL) to prevent unauthorized access, and the Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) protocol intended to provide data security. These three 802.11 components will be first described, I will then explain in the chapter 3.4, the underlying security vulnerabilities for each of them.

3.1. Service Set Identifier (SSID)

From a layered defense concept, the SSID is the first security level provided by the 802.11 standard to control the wireless network access. The SSID is a unique identifier up to 32 characters attribute to the network or a domain at network set up time. Every wireless client and Access Point belonging to the same network must use the same SSID. When a wireless client tries to connect to an AP, the SSID acts as a password device must provide to be authorized to join the network.
Contrary to other security features, the SSID mechanism is mandatory and cannot be disabled.
Each 802.11 device manufacturer provides a default identifier value. Below is a table of the major manufacturer's SSID. The complete list of default wireless SSID for each manufacturer can be found at the CIRT web site [3].

Manufacturer	Default SSID
3Com	101, comcomcom
Cisco	Tsunami, WaveLAN Network
Compaq	Compaq
Dlink	WLAN
Intel	101, 195, xlan, intel
Linksys	Linksys, wireless
Lucent/Cabletron	RoamAbout
NetGear	Wireless

Table 1: Sample Default Vendor's SSID

3.2. Access Control List (ACL)

Still based on the layered defense concept, the Access Control List (ACL) is another way to control access to the wireless network. The network administrator can allow or deny access to the Access Point by configuring ACL on the AP itself.
ACL relies upon a MAC addresses table stored on the AP to authenticate individual clients requesting access to the Access Point.
This feature increases the security of the wireless network by preventing unauthorized access to the Access Point. Contrary to the SSID, the ACL is an optional feature.

[3] http://www.cirt.net/cgi-bin/ssids.pl

3.3. Wired Equivalent Protocol (WEP)

To give wireless networks an equivalent security level as the wired network, the 802.11 standard defined the Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) protocol. This protocol is used to protect wireless communication from eavesdropping through encryption and to prevent unauthorized access to the wireless network with authentication. Both encryption and authentication mechanisms rely on a secret key shared between a mobile station and the Access Point.
Note that WEP is defined by the standard as optional and neither Access Points nor wireless devices are obliged to use it. It is also possible to have a wireless device using the authentication feature but not the encryption one and vice versa.

3.3.1. Encryption

With WEP enabled, all the data is encrypted using the Ron Rivest Code 4 (RC4) developed in 1987 for RSA Data Security [4], in the purpose to provide secure communication. In addition, WEP protects the wireless traffic with a randomly generated 24-bit Initialization Vector (IV), which is combined with the 40-bit or 104-bit shared secret key (so-called 128 bit in most product implementation). The WEP encryption operation [5] is described below:

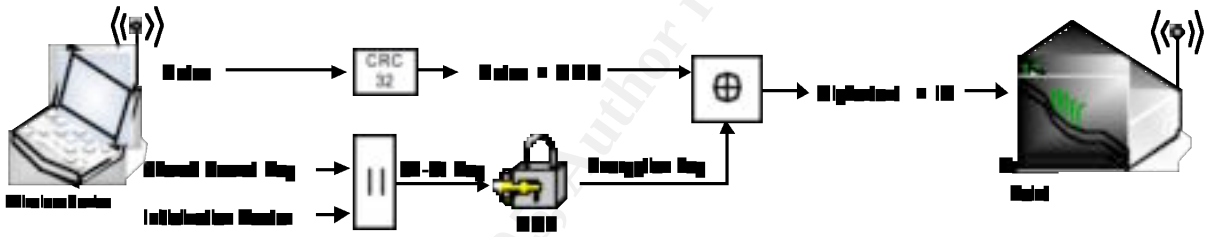

Figure 1: WEP Encryption Process [6]

1: The 40-bit shared secret key is concatenated with the 24-bit randomly generated Initialization Vector (IV). The IV is used to increased security by introducing cryptographic variance to the Initial Shared Secret Key.

2: The new 64-bit key is fed into the RC4 algorithm to create the Encryption key or key stream.

3: Before encrypting the data, an integrity check is performed with the Cyclic Redundancy Check-32 (CRC-32) algorithm. This step intends to protect against data modification. The CRC operation generates a 4 bytes CRC which is concatenated to the initial data to obtain the plaintext that will be used as input in step 4. The shared secret key is not used in this process.

[4] http://www.rsasecurity.com/rsalabs/node.asp?id=2250
[5] Khan Jahanzeb, Khwaja Anis. Building Secure Wireless Networks with 802.1. Page 125.
[6] Males Davor, Pujolle Guy. Wi-Fi par la pratique 2nd Edition. Page 111.

4: The plaintext (data and its concatenated CRC) is encrypted with the encryption key (or key stream) generated in step 2, using the mathematical XOR function to obtain the ciphertext.

5: The encrypted output can now be send to transmission with the Initialization Vector appended to the ciphertext.

6: The client will use the reverse steps to decrypt the ciphertext and recover the original data.

3.3.2. Authentication

The authentication mechanism is using the same shared secret key used for the encryption process. The two possible ways of performing authentication are Open System Authentication and Shared Key Authentication.

- Open System Authentication:

Open System Authentication is the default authentication method. The mechanism as described below [7] is working in two steps:

Figure 2: Open System Authentication

1: The station willing to join the wireless network sends an authentication request.

2: The Access Point will check the shared secret key and will reply with a negative or positive answer.

Open System Authentication is also referred to as 'null authentication' as neither client nor AP have the opportunity to authenticate each other. This process only checks that the wireless device trying to connect possesses the shared secret key. This mechanism is not recommended for wireless network who care for security of their data.

- Shared Key Authentication [8]:

Contrary to OSA, Shared Key Authentication needs to have WEP enable and is using the Shared Secret Key defined on each station. This process is as follow:

[7] Khan Jahanzeb, Khwaja Anis. Building Secure Wireless Networks with 802.1. Page 128.
[8] Khan Jahanzeb, Khwaja Anis. Building Secure Wireless Networks with 802.1. Page 129.

Figure 3: Shared Key Authentication

1: The wireless device willing to connect to the network sends an Authentication request to the Access Point.

2: The AP will return a 128 bits authentication frame of random challenge text.

3: After receiving the challenge text, the wireless device will encrypt the challenge text with its shared secret key and will send it back to the AP.

4: The AP receiving the challenge text encrypted will apply its own shared secret key and will compare with the challenge text sent in step 2. When both texts are identical, the AP will return a confirmation that the wireless device has been authenticated. If not, the AP will send a negative authentication and will deny the access to the wireless device

3.4. IEEE 802.11 Standard Security weaknesses

The security mechanisms defined by the IEEE 802.11 intends to provide security to the wireless LAN with access control, authentication, and encryption. Unfortunately the mechanisms described above do not protect from trivial script kiddies to more sophisticated attacks. SSID, ACL and WEP present known vulnerabilities are described as follows:

3.4.1. SSID vulnerabilities

The SSID is broadcasted periodically by the Access Point (beaconing frames) to all wireless devices in range. Wireless devices, assuming they have the correct SSID configured, can dynamically discover Access Point and automatically join wireless LAN. The drawback of this feature is that using a sniffer like Netstumbler [9], it is easy for an attacker to find the SSID and get unauthorized access.
It is possible to disable the SSID broadcast feature. The user will have to manually enter the SSID to be able to join the network. However, even with the SSID broadcast turned off, it is still possible for an attacker to get to the SSID at the association phase. As a matter of fact, the SSID still will need to be transmitted during the association request between the AP and the wireless device and an attacker might use this opportunity to steal the SSID.
Another way for an attacker to guess the SSID is to try several default SSIDs: Each wireless product comes with a predefined default SSID (see table 1). If the default

[9] http://www.netstumbler.com/downloads/netstumbler_v0.4.0_release_notes.pdf

SSID is not modified by the user, it becomes very easy for an attacker to get the corresponding SSID as this information is freely available on the web [10].

3.4.2. ACL vulnerabilities

The ACL is an optional feature to allow the network administrator to restrict access to authorized users only, based on MAC addresses filtering. Because the MAC addresses are visible by packet sniffer, it is possible for an attacker to identify the authorized MAC addresses. It is then possible for the attacker to use one of these MAC addresses to deceive the AP and gain authorization to access the network.

3.4.3. WEP vulnerabilities

WEP protocol has major weaknesses on both authentication and encryption. What is making WEP very poor from a security stand point is the fact that every component of this protocol including Integrity Check, Initialization Vector, and RC4 has inherent security weaknesses.

- The shared secret keys are manually configured once at installation and most of the time rarely or never changed.
- The use of the RC4 algorithm is vulnerable to several kinds of attacks. It has been shown by Fluhrer, Mantin and Shamir in their publication 'Weaknesses in the Key Scheduling Algorithm of RC4' [11] that performing a cryptographic attack against RC4, it is possible to recover a WEP shared secret key in a couple of hours.
- Under certain conditions, there is a non null probability to have repetition of the same IV, causing a so-called IV collision (e.g. two wireless devices connecting at the same time might both initialize the IV to the same value). Because the shared secret key doesn't change, an IV collision will generate the same key stream. It is then possible for an attacker predicting the IV collision to collect enough data to recover a plain text message [12].
- Because the CRC-32 is a linear hash, it is possible for an attacker to correctly adjust the checksum and compute it in such a way that it will appear valid to the destination [13].

Note that despite the security weaknesses described above, 802.11 WEP protocol is commonly used on most of the WLANs, due to its low-cost implementation, its efficient service, easy of use and quick set up capacities.

4. 802.1x

802.1x is presented as an improvement to the WEP as 802.1x provides a framework for better protecting authentication and includes mechanism for automatic key distribution. 802.1x authentication architecture originally defined for the wired networks has been implemented on the 802.11 based wireless networks.

[10] http://www.cirt.net/cgi-bin/ssids.pl
[11] http://downloads.securityfocus.com/library/rc4_ksaproc.pdf
[12] http://www.isaac.cs.berkeley.edu/isaac/wep-faq.html
[13] http://www.isaac.cs.berkeley.edu/isaac/mobicom.pdf

802.1x architecture, also called Port-based Network Access Control, is based on three elements illustrated [14] below:

- The user or wireless client that wants to get access to the wireless network (so-called 'Supplicant' in the IEEE documentation).
- An Access Point (also called 'Authenticator') controlling the wireless client access by rejecting any non authentication traffic and relaying the information to the Authentication server.
- An authentication server.

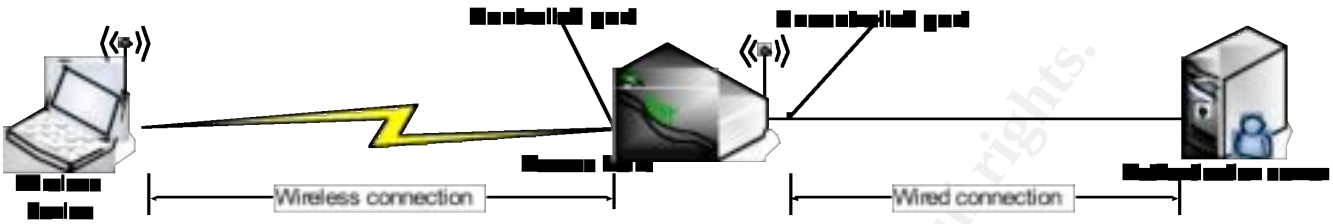

Figure 4: 802.x Architecture

The wireless connection between the client and the Access Point is considered un-trusted. Any traffic from the client to the Access Point will go through the controlled port and only authentication packets will be accepted until the client has been authenticated by the Access Point.
The connection between the Access Point and the authentication server which is considered as trusted network will go through an uncontrolled port.
In the 802.1x standard, the authentication between the client and the Access Point rely on the Extensible Authentication Protocol (EAP) protocol, and a Remote Authentication Dial-In User Service (RADIUS) server. Note that RADIUS is not issued from the 802.1x standard but most wireless implementations adopted RADIUS as the preferred authentication server. RADIUS as remote authentication protocol [15] presents several advantages like a user-based authentication rather than device-based, and the ease to manage the authentication data on a centralized location.

Extensible Authentication Protocol (EAP) operate at the layer 2 (MAC address layer) during the authentication stage of the wireless device. EAP will drive the authentication negotiations between the wireless device, the access point and the authentication server, along with the 802.1*x* which provides the port-based access control.
Several EAP authentication are available, each of them propose different features and functionality summarized [16] here after and in the table which compares the different EAP methods [17].

[14] Males Davor, Pujolle Guy. Wi-Fi par la pratique 2nd Edition. Pages 123-126.
[15] http://www.untruth.org/~josh/security/radius/radius-auth.html
[16] John Rittinghouse, John. Ransome , James. Wireless Operational Security. Digital Press. 2004. Chapter 10.2.
[17] http://www.funk.com/radius/Solns/EAP_type_chart.gif

- EAP-MD5 uses a challenge handshake equivalent to the PPP-based CHAP protocol. An MD5 hash of a username and password is send for authentication to the RADIUS server.

- LEAP: Lightweight EAP is the Cisco proprietary implementation of EAP and uses password only authentication.

- EAP-TLS Transport Level Security is a Microsoft solution requiring a PKI infrastructure. Digital certificate instead of user name password are used to perform mutual authentication of client and server.

- EAP-TTLS is an extension to EAP-TLS where only the server side is using certificate to authenticate while the client side can use any password-based methods to authenticate.

- PEAP: Protected EAP is designed to protect EAP communication between clients and authenticators. PEAP uses TLS to create an encrypted tunnel from the authentication server to the supplicant.

Topic	EAP-MD5	LEAP (Cisco)	EAP-TLS (MS)	EAP-TTLS (Funk); PEAP (MS/Cisco)
Security solution	Standards-based	Proprietary	Standards-based	Standards-based
Certificates - Clients	No	N/A	Yes	No
Certificates - Servers	No	N/A	Yes	Yes
Credential Security	None	Weak	Strong	Strong
Supported Authentication Databases	Requires clear-test databases	Active Directory, NT Domains	Active Directory	Act Dir, NT Domain, Token Systems SQL LDAP
Dynamic Key Exchange	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mutual authentication	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2: EAP Authentication Methods Comparison

EAP over LAN (EAPol) is the standard encapsulation method used to carries EAP messages over Ethernet-like LANs or 802.11 wireless LAN. EAPoL is used for all communications between the Supplicant and the Authenticator and doesn't provide itself any authentication mechanisms.

It is necessary when configuring the server and the client to choose one of the EAP methods (EAP-TLS or EAP-TTLS or PEAP, etc), which defines how the authentication takes place. The Access Point will act as a pass through between the server and the client. The steps below describe a complete 802.1x process to authenticate a client with the authentication server.

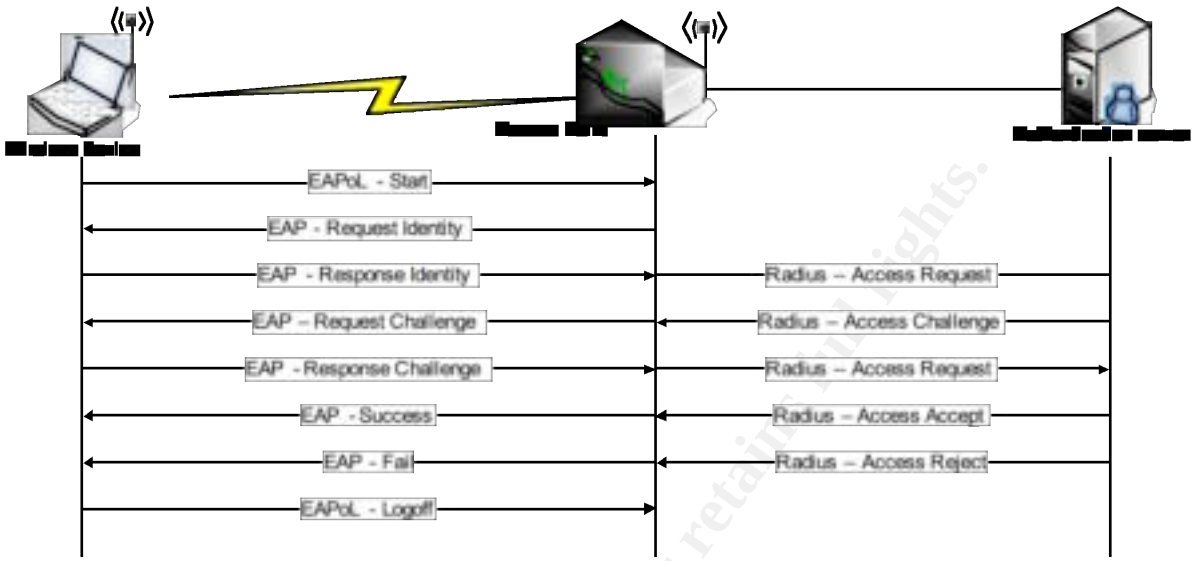

Figure 5: 802.1x Authentication Process

1: The wireless client requests access with an EAPoL- Start message sent to the Access Point. This will begin the client authentication process.

2: The AP replies with an EAP-Request Identity message.

3: The client sends an EAP-Response Identity message.

4: The AP forwards the access request to the authentication server including the client's identity.

5: The authentication server responds to the Access Point with an access Challenge including the type of EAP authentication that has to take place between the client and the authentication server.

6: The AP forwards the Access challenge to the client.

7: The client acknowledges on the EAP type to continue the negotiation. If the client disagrees on the EAP type, it will send an alternative EAP type.

8: AP forwards to the Authentication server.

9: The authentication server uses the authentication algorithm to verify the client's identity. If the credentials are correct, it server accepts the user. If not, the user is rejected. An Access-Accept or Access-Reject is sent to the AP.

10: The Accept or Reject is forwarded to the client. When authentication succeeds, the Access Point sets the client's port to the authorized state and starts transmit traffic.

4.1. Summary

802.1x/EAP implemented on a WLAN is a security improvement compare to the WEP, by providing strong authentication methods, and ensuring both wireless clients and server are mutually authenticated. The EAP dynamic key exchange also provides a much stronger security solution than the static and per device shared secret key used in WEP.

5. 802.11i

802.11i developed by the IEEE 802.11 Task-group 'i', is a new standard designed to address many of the WEP security weaknesses and enhance the security in a wireless LAN system in such a way that this system will be fully secured. The standard was approved on June 2004 [18].

802.11i defined two main pieces: the first piece of this standard is authentication relying on 802.1x. The second piece provides encryption and data integrity based on TKIP and AES. The key technical element of these pieces will be described in the following section.
In parallel to this mechanism, 802.11i introduced the concept of security policies in the equipment to reinforce the network access control. These security policies are set up in the wireless station and the Access Point.
All these mechanisms define a secure wireless LAN network so-called Robust Security Network (RSN).
Once the security policies have been defined in the equipments, four steps occur to build the secure wireless LAN network:

1. Discovery
2. Authentication
3. Key management
4. Encryption

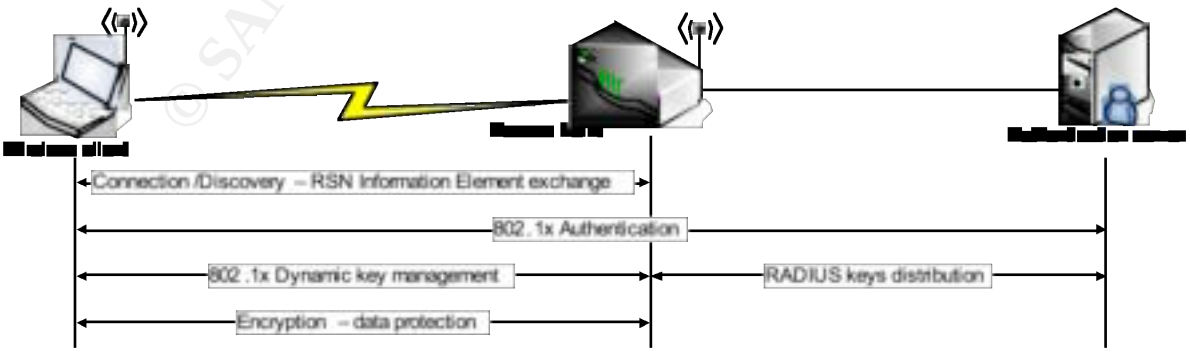

Figure 6: 802.11i, the 4 Operational Steps

[18] http://standards.ieee.org/cgi-bin/status?wireless

5.1. Discovery

Because different encryption protocols are available, the IEEE 802.11i defines a discovery phase between the Wireless device and the Access Point to negotiate which protocol to use and to discover each other security parameters.
This discovery phase is under the initiative of the wireless station that automatically sends a probe request to discover the nearest AP to connect. The AP sends back its RSN security policy including the authentication and encryption algorithms to be used for communications. Once the process is over, the wireless station and the AP have setup a communication channel and both are ready to start the authentication phase.
Note that the RSN dynamic negotiation lets RSN be 'future proof' and open to new encryption protocols or authentication schemes as new security threats will be discovered.

5.2. Authentication

802.11i authentication relies on the 802.1x architecture meaning it uses EAP and an authentication server as described in chapter 4.
802.11i requires mutual authentication between the client and the authentication server so only the modes EAP-TLS, EAP-TTLS, PEAP, and LEAP providing this function will be supported by the standard (EAP-MD5 doesn't have the mutual authentication capability).
There is no requirement relative to the authentication server but RADIUS is still the preferred solution.
At the end of the authentication process, the wireless station and the AP have established a session and each of them possesses a Master Key (MK) and a derived Pairwise Master Key (PMK).

5.3. Key management

Contrary to the WEP which is based on a static keys system, IEEE 802.11i defines a dynamic key-distribution mechanism providing fresh and nonce cryptographic keys. These keys mechanism relies on a hierarchical model to divide up the initial key into multiple sub-keys. Two arborescence are defined as *Pairwise key hierarchy* and *Group key hierarchy* [19].

- A Master Key (MK) is defined in the wireless station and the authentication server.
- A soon as a new wireless station connect to the network, a new Pairwise Master Key (PMK) is generated from the Master Key (MK). This key is defined per session between the wireless station and the AP. The PMK is used for the EAP authentication process.
- The Pairwise Transient Key (PTK) is the collection of three operational keys:
  - Key confirmation Key (KCK) used to prove possession of the PMK.
  - Key encryption Key (KEK) used to distribute Group Transient Key (GTK)

[19] http://www.sans.org/rr/whitepapers/wireless/1467.php

- Temporal Key (TK), used in the AES encryption process to secure the data traffic.

➢ The Group Transient Key (GTK) used to secure multicast and broadcast traffic.

The figure 7 illustrates the process described above [20].

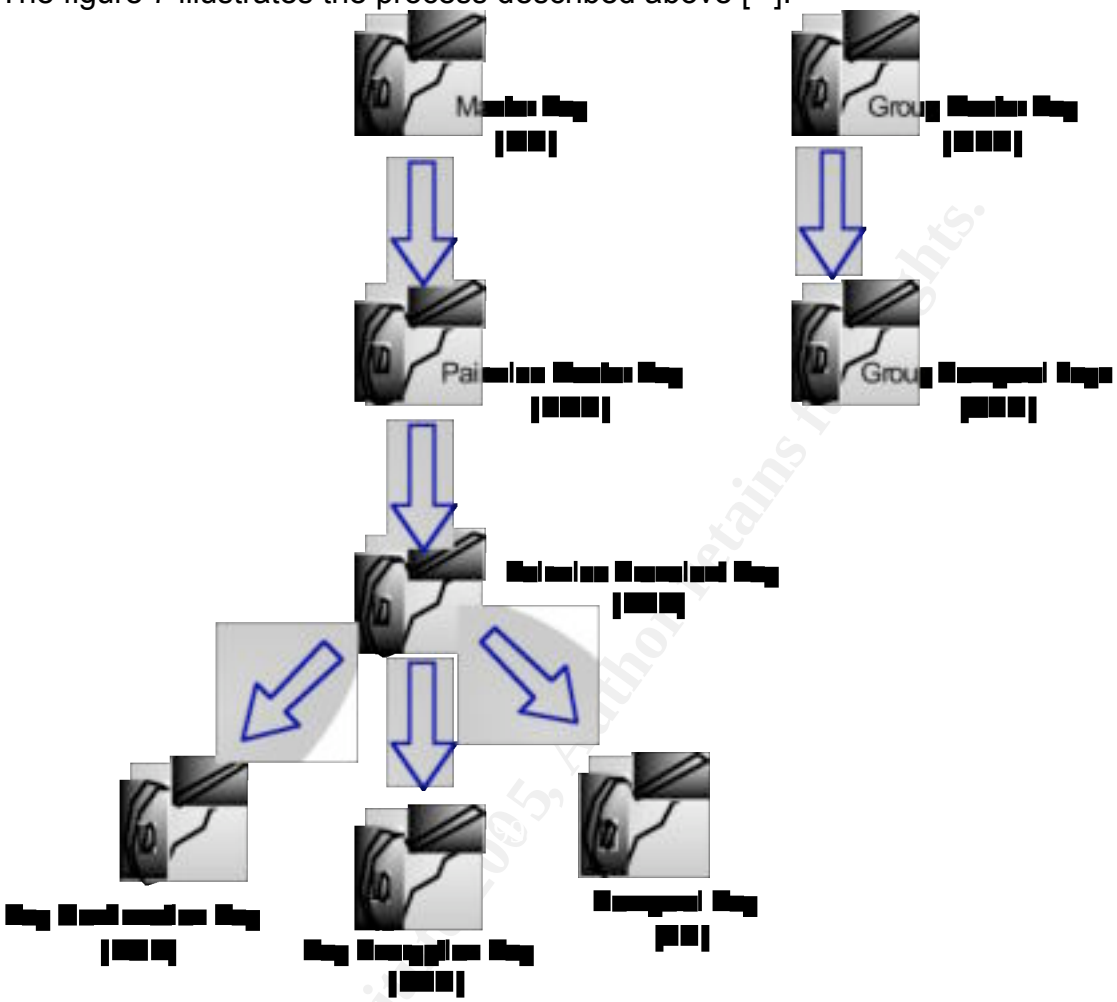

Figure 7: 802.11i Key Hierarchy Structure

5.4. Encryption and Control integrity

802.11i defines three encryption modes: Temporal Key Integrity Protocol (TKIP), Counter mode with Cipher block chaining Message authentication code Protocol (CCMP) and Wireless Robust Authentication Protocol (WRAP).

5.4.1. Temporal Key Integrity Protocol (TKIP)

TKIP was initially developed to address the security weaknesses and deficiencies of WEP. It has been included in the 801.11i especially to provide backward compatibility for 802.11 legacy wireless hardware. TKIP offers the advantage of a smooth migration from WEP to 802.11i with the capability to have legacy and new

[20] Males Davor, Pujolle Guy. Wi-Fi par la pratique 2nd Edition. Page 132.

equipment working together. TKIP brings the following security improvements over the WEP:

- The initial WEP 24 bits IV is increased to 48 bits lowering the collision probability.
- An additional TKIP Sequence Counter (TSC) addresses the replay attack.
- Integrity check initially performed with CRC-32, is replaced with Michael algorithm so called Message Integrity Code (MIC) providing a keyed cryptographic checksum using source and destination MAC address added to the plaintext data.
- Dynamic Key management is introduced, thus removing the weakness to have identical/never changed key on the wireless devices. A Master Key (MK) defined per user, generate two sub-key, the MIC key used for the data integrity and the Temporal Key (TK) used for the encryption process.

5.4.2. Counter mode with Cipher block chaining Message authentication code Protocol (CCMP)

Instead of TKIP designed to improve security on legacy wireless devices, CCMP is a new security alternative for future manufactured wireless products.
CCMP relies on an evolution of Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) called AES-CCM (Counter with CBC MAC) to provide data privacy, data integrity and packets authentication. The picture below details the relationship between the protocols:

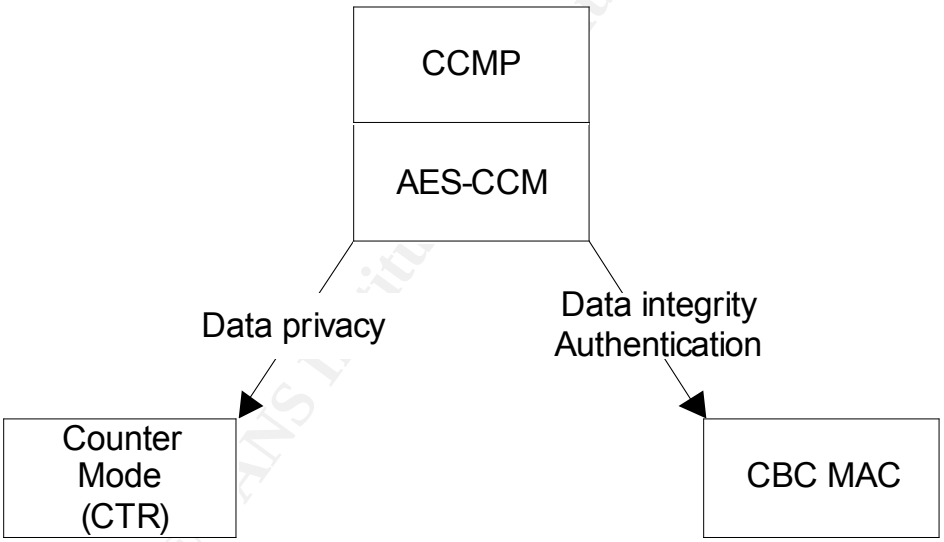

Figure 8: AES/CCM Relationship

AES is a cryptographic algorithm used to protect electronic data [21] based on symmetric bloc cipher, using cryptographic key length of 128, 192 and 256 bits to encrypt and decrypt data in block of 128 bits. Several cryptographic modes are used by AES:

[21] http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/fips/fips197/fips-197.pdf

Mode Cipher-Block Chaining (CBC): each block of plaintext is XORed with the previous cipher text block before being encrypted. CBC is the encryption mode used by CCMP to provide Data integrity.

Mode Counter (CTR) generates the cipher text by adding an arbitrary counter to the AES key before XORed the plaintext. The counter can be any simple function which produces a sequence which is guaranteed not to repeat for a long time (see figure below) [22]. CTR is the encryption mode used by CCMP to provide data privacy.

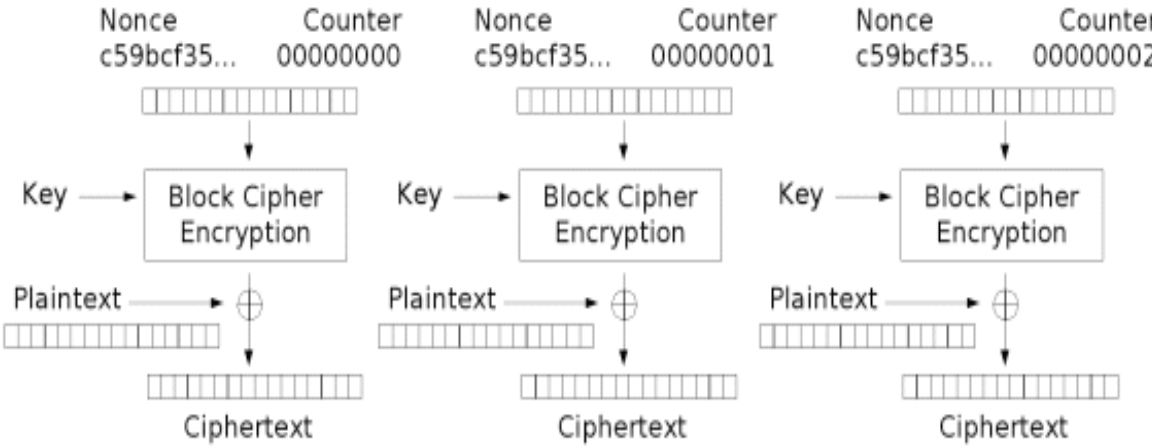

Figure 9: Counter Mode Encryption

CBC-MAC [23] is an iterative Message Authentication Code (MAC) algorithm based on the CBC encryption mode. The MAC algorithm use AES to compute the plaintext with a secret key and iterates the process until a Message Integrity Code (MIC) value is generated and appended to the plaintext.

All together CCMP provides encryption and data integrity using CBC-MAC to compute a MIC and CTR to encrypt the data and the MIC with AES. The figure 10 summarizes this process [24]:

[22] http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/counter%20mode
[23] http://www.win.tue.nl/~henkvt/cbcmacv1c.pdf
[24] http://www.cs.huji.ac.il/~sans/students_lectures/WEP_Solutions.ppt page 19-25.

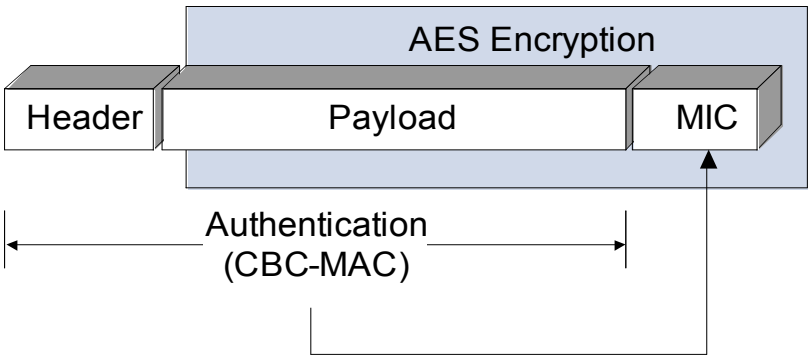

Figure 10: Encryption and Authentication with CCMP

5.4.3. Wireless Robust Authenticated Protocol (WRAP)

WRAP relies on AES- Offset Code Book (OCB). Intellectual property issues caused the IEEE to define this protocol as optional.

5.5. Summary

The IEEE 802.11i extension adds to the initial 802.11 standard stronger encryption enhancing confidentiality, better data origin authenticity, key management ties to authentication and encryption, bringing the wireless security model a step forward.

6. Conclusion

Since the first draft of wireless standard released by the IEEE, many security improvements have been introduced enhancing drastically the security of the wireless networks. At the beginning, WEP can be defined as a 'better than no security'. Following the WEP was the 802.1x standard improving the security with a set of features fixing the WEP issues for legacy products. The new 802.11i standard intends to resolve the security issues for both legacy and future manufactured generation of wireless products using a modular architecture and a set of protocols bringing stronger encryption, authentication, and key management.
Can we consider this latest standard as the ultimate solution to secure a wireless network and the stop-gap the industry was waiting for to start massively the deployment of wireless LANs in their corporations? Probably yes, but let's keep in mind that the cryptography history is full of supposedly unbreakable codes and it seems to be just a matter of time and technologies before hackers will find the breach in the safest security algorithm. While the fight between improved security technologies and code breaker will still go on, I think the important challenge is to permanently seek out for new security threats that might compromise the security of the wireless infrastructure to better protect against them, and plan to continually keep up with newer technologies that might come out to enforce the security.

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