Textual Encodings of PKIX, PKCS, and CMS Structures

Abstract

This document describes and discusses the textual encodings of the Public-Key Infrastructure X.509 (PKIX), Public-Key Cryptography Standards (PKCS), and Cryptographic Message Syntax (CMS). The textual encodings are well-known, are implemented by several applications and libraries, and are widely deployed. This document articulates the de facto rules by which existing implementations operate and defines them so that future implementations can interoperate.

Status of This Memo

This is an Internet Standards Track document.

This document is a product of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). It represents the consensus of the IETF community. It has received public review and has been approved for publication by the Internet Engineering Steering Group (IESG). Further information on Internet Standards is available in Section 2 of RFC 5741.

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1. Introduction

Several security-related standards used on the Internet define ASN.1 data formats that are normally encoded using the Basic Encoding Rules (BER) or Distinguished Encoding Rules (DER) [X.690], which are binary, octet-oriented encodings. This document is about the textual encodings of the following formats:

1. Certificates, Certificate Revocation Lists (CRLs), and Subject Public Key Info structures in the Internet X.509 Public Key Infrastructure Certificate and Certificate Revocation List (CRL) Profile [RFC5280].
2. PKCS #10: Certification Request Syntax [RFC2986].
3. PKCS #7: Cryptographic Message Syntax [RFC2315].
5. PKCS #8: Private-Key Information Syntax [RFC5208], renamed to One Asymmetric Key in Asymmetric Key Package [RFC5958], and Encrypted Private-Key Information Syntax in the same documents.


A disadvantage of a binary data format is that it cannot be interchanged in textual transports, such as email or text documents. One advantage with text-based encodings is that they are easy to modify using common text editors; for example, a user may concatenate several certificates to form a certificate chain with copy-and-paste operations.

The tradition within the RFC series can be traced back to Privacy-Enhanced Mail (PEM) [RFC1421], based on a proposal by Marshall Rose in Message Encapsulation [RFC934]. Originally called "PEM encapsulation mechanism", "encapsulated PEM message", or (arguably) "PEM printable encoding", today the format is sometimes referred to as "PEM encoding". Variations include OpenPGP ASCII armor [RFC4880] and OpenSSH key file format [RFC4716].

For reasons that basically boil down to non-coordination or inattention, many PKIX, PKCS, and CMS libraries implement a text-based encoding that is similar to -- but not identical with -- PEM encoding. This document specifies the _textual encoding_ format, articulates the de facto rules that most implementations operate by, and provides recommendations that will promote interoperability going forward. This document also provides common nomenclature for syntax elements, reflecting the evolution of this de facto standard format. Peter Gutmann's "X.509 Style Guide" [X.509SG] contains a section "base64 Encoding" that describes the formats and contains suggestions similar to what is in this document. All figures are real, functional examples, with key lengths and inner contents chosen to be as small as practicable.

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in RFC 2119 [RFC2119].

2. General Considerations

Textual encoding begins with a line comprising "-----BEGIN ", a label, and "-----", and ends with a line comprising "-----END ", a label, and "-----". Between these lines, or "encapsulation boundaries", are base64-encoded data according to Section 4 of [RFC4648]. (PEM [RFC1421] referred to this data as the "encapsulated
Data before the encapsulation boundaries are permitted, and parsers MUST NOT malfunction when processing such data. Furthermore, parsers SHOULD ignore whitespace and other non-base64 characters and MUST handle different newline conventions.

The type of data encoded is labeled depending on the type label in the "-----BEGIN " line (pre-encapsulation boundary). For example, the line may be "-----BEGIN CERTIFICATE-----" to indicate that the content is a PKIX certificate (see further below). Generators MUST put the same label on the "-----END " line (post-encapsulation boundary) as the corresponding "-----BEGIN " line. Labels are formally case-sensitive, uppercase, and comprised of zero or more characters; they do not contain consecutive spaces or hyphen-minuses, nor do they contain spaces or hyphen-minuses at either end. Parsers MAY disregard the label in the post-encapsulation boundary instead of signaling an error if there is a label mismatch: some extant implementations require the labels to match; others do not.

There is exactly one space character (SP) separating the "BEGIN" or "END" from the label. There are exactly five hyphen-minus (also known as dash) characters ("--") on both ends of the encapsulation boundaries, no more, no less.

The label type implies that the encoded data follows the specified syntax. Parsers MUST handle non-conforming data gracefully. However, not all parsers or generators prior to this document behave consistently. A conforming parser MAY interpret the contents as another label type but ought to be aware of the security implications discussed in the Security Considerations section. The labels described in this document identify container formats that are not specific to any particular cryptographic algorithm, a property consistent with algorithm agility. These formats use the ASN.1 AlgorithmIdentifier structure as described in Section 4.1.1.2 of [RFC5280].

Unlike legacy PEM encoding [RFC1421], OpenPGP ASCII armor, and the OpenSSH key file format, textual encoding does *not* define or permit headers to be encoded alongside the data. Empty space can appear between the pre-encapsulation boundary and the base64, but generators SHOULD NOT emit such any such spacing. (The provision for this empty area is a throwback to PEM, which defined an "encapsulated header portion".) Implementers need to be aware that extant parsers diverge considerably on the handling of whitespace. In this document, "whitespace" means any character or series of characters that represent horizontal or vertical space in typography. In US-ASCII, whitespace means HT (0x09), VT (0x0B), FF (0x0C), SP (0x20), CR
(0x0D), and LF (0x0A); "blank" means HT and SP; lines are divided with CRLF, CR, or LF. The common ABNF production WSP is congruent with "blank"; a new production W is used for "whitespace". The ABNF in Section 3 is specific to US-ASCII. As these textual encodings can be used on many different systems as well as on long-term archival storage media such as paper or engravings, an implementer ought to use the spirit rather than the letter of the rules when generating or parsing these formats in environments that are not strictly limited to US-ASCII.

Most extant parsers ignore blanks at the ends of lines; blanks at the beginnings of lines or in the middle of the base64-encoded data are far less compatible. These observations are codified in Figure 1. The most lax parser implementations are not line-oriented at all and will accept any mixture of whitespace outside of the encapsulation boundaries (see Figure 2). Such lax parsing may run the risk of accepting text that was not intended to be accepted in the first place (e.g., because the text was a snippet or sample).

Generators MUST wrap the base64-encoded lines so that each line consists of exactly 64 characters except for the final line, which will encode the remainder of the data (within the 64-character line boundary), and they MUST NOT emit extraneous whitespace. Parsers MAY handle other line sizes. These requirements are consistent with PEM [RFC1421].

Files MAY contain multiple textual encoding instances. This is used, for example, when a file contains several certificates. Whether the instances are ordered or unordered depends on the context.

3. ABNF

The ABNF [RFC5234] of the textual encoding is:

textualmsg = preeb *WSP eol 
*eolWSP 
 base64text 
 posteb *WSP [eol]

preeb = "-----BEGIN " label "-----" ; unlike [RFC1421] (A)BNF, 
 ; eol is not required (but
posteb = "-----END " label "-----" ; see [RFC1421], Section 4.4)

base64char = ALPHA / DIGIT / "+" / "/"

base64pad = "="

base64line = 1*base64char *WSP eol
base64finl = *base64char (base64pad *WSP eol base64pad / *2base64pad) *WSP eol ; ...AB= <EOL> = <EOL> is not good, but is valid

base64text = *base64line base64finl
 ; we could also use <encbinbody> from RFC 1421, which requires
 ; 16 groups of 4 chars, which means exactly 64 chars per
 ; line, except the final line, but this is more accurate

labelchar = %x21-2C / %x2E-7E ; any printable character,
 ; except hyphen-minus

label = [ labelchar *(["-" / SP] labelchar ) ] ; empty ok

eol = CRLF / CR / LF

eolWSP = WSP / CR / LF ; compare with LWSP

Figure 1: ABNF (Standard)

laxtextualmsg = *W preeb
laxbase64text
posteb *W

W = WSP / CR / LF / %x0B / %x0C ; whitespace

laxbase64text = *(W / base64char) [base64pad *W [base64pad *W]]

Figure 2: ABNF (Lax)

stricttextualmsg = preeb eol
strictbase64text
posteb eol

strictbase64finl = *15(4base64char) (4base64char / 3base64char
base64pad / 2base64char 2base64pad) eol

base64fullline = 64base64char eol

strictbase64text = *base64fullline strictbase64finl

Figure 3: ABNF (Strict)

New implementations SHOULD emit the strict format (Figure 3)
specified above. The choice of parsing strategy depends on the
context of use.
4. Guide

For convenience, these figures summarize the structures, encodings, and references in the following sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sec.</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>ASN.1 Type</th>
<th>Reference Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CERTIFICATE</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>[RFC5280] id-pkix1-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X509 CRL</td>
<td>CertificateList</td>
<td>[RFC5280] id-pkix1-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CERTIFICATE REQUEST</td>
<td>CertificationRequest</td>
<td>[RFC2986] id-pkcs10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PKCS7</td>
<td>ContentInfo</td>
<td>[RFC2315] id-pkcs7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>ContentInfo</td>
<td>[RFC5652] id-cms2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PRIVATE KEY</td>
<td>PrivateKeyInfo ::=</td>
<td>[RFC5280] id-pkcs8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>OneAsymmetricKey</td>
<td>[RFC5958] id-aKPV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>ENCRYPTED PRIVATE KEY</td>
<td>EncryptedPrivateKeyInfo</td>
<td>[RFC5958] id-aKPV1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ATTRIBUTE CERTIFICATE</td>
<td>AttributeCertificate</td>
<td>[RFC5755] id-acv2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>PUBLIC KEY</td>
<td>SubjectPublicKeyInfo</td>
<td>[RFC5280] id-pkix1-e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Convenience Guide

Figure 5: ASN.1 Module Object Identifier Value Assignments

* This OID does not actually appear in PKCS #7 v1.5 [RFC2315]. It was defined in the ASN.1 module to PKCS #7 v1.6 [P7v1.6], and has been carried forward through PKCS #12 [RFC7292].
5. Textual Encoding of Certificates

5.1. Encoding

Public-key certificates are encoded using the "CERTIFICATE" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER (DER strongly preferred; see Appendix B) encoded ASN.1 Certificate structure as described in Section 4 of [RFC5280].

```
-----BEGIN CERTIFICATE-----
MIICLDCCAdKgAwIBAgIBADAKBggqhkjOPQQDAjB9MQswCQYDVQQGEwJCRTEPMA0G
A1UEchMGR251VExTSUwIwYDVQQLEExhBnVUTFMgY2VydgGlmaWNhdGUYXV0aG9y
aXR5MQ8wDQYDVQQIEwZMZXV2ZW4xJTAjBgNVBAMTHEdudVRMUYbJZJ0aWZpY2F0
ZSBhXRob3JpdhKhchNMTIezJizMjAzODIxWhcnMTIyM3d0MTUxWjB9MQsw
CQYDVQQGEwJCRTEPMA0GAIUEchMGR251VExTSUwIwYDVQQLEExhBnVUTFMgY2Vy
gGlmaWNhdGUYXV0aG9yaXR5MQ8wDQYDVQQIEwZMZXV2ZW4xJTAjBgNVBAMTHEd
dVRMUYbJZJ0aWZpY2F0ZSBhXRob3JpdhKhkwWTATBggqhkjOPQIBggghkqjOPQMB
BwNCARERI0iuiNn14Y2sSALCX3IybiXJUvxUoj+oNZngujhjyv2394BWnW4X
uQ4TETiywK87WRRcWmGgJ5kx/T2no0MwQTAPBgNVHRMBAf8EBTADAQH/MA8GA1UD
DwEB/wQFAwMBhgAwH1DvDR0OBBYEFPCC06fYgr+1KLlkQAPLzB9mTigDAOGCCqG
SM49BAMCA0gAMEUCIDuwwD1KPfY+hrf8BMeyMqQOFZD0TbV1FLF+UsAG4enAiEA
14w0uZwX2C+/4mKANBC610i0g0Tlpo=
-----END CERTIFICATE-----
```

Figure 6: Certificate Example

Historically, the label "X509 CERTIFICATE" and also less commonly "X.509 CERTIFICATE" have been used. Generators conforming to this document MUST generate "CERTIFICATE" labels and MUST NOT generate "X509 CERTIFICATE" or "X.509 CERTIFICATE" labels. Parsers SHOULD NOT treat "X509 CERTIFICATE" or "X.509 CERTIFICATE" as equivalent to "CERTIFICATE", but a valid exception may be for backwards compatibility (potentially together with a warning).
5.2. Explanatory Text

Many tools are known to emit explanatory text before the BEGIN and after the END lines for PKIX certificates, more than any other type. If emitted, such text SHOULD be related to the certificate, such as providing a textual representation of key data elements in the certificate.

Subject: CN=Atlantis
Issuer: CN=Atlantis
Validity: from 7/9/2012 3:10:38 AM UTC to 7/9/2013 3:10:37 AM UTC

-----BEGIN CERTIFICATE-----
MIIBmTCCAuFgAwIBAgIBKjAJBgUrDgMCHGUAMETAPBgNVBAMTFk1vY2VtbyMuY3JlZ29y
MB4XDTExMDc2OTIzMDAwNzEyMDAwMDAwWzA9FQsBAgVEAgEAMB0GA1UdDwEB/wQEAwIB
-----BEGIN CERTIFICATE-----
MIIBmTCCAuFgAwIBAgIBKjAJBgUrDgMCHGUAMETAPBgNVBAMTFk1vY2VtbyMuY3JlZ29y
MB4XDTExMDc2OTIzMDAwNzEyMDAwMDAwWzA9FQsBAgVEAgEAMB0GA1UdDwEB/wQEAwIB

Figure 7: Certificate Example with Explanatory Text

5.3. File Extension

Although textual encodings of PKIX structures can occur anywhere, many tools are known to offer an option to output this encoding when serializing PKIX structures. To promote interoperability and to separate DER encodings from textual encodings, the extension ".crt" SHOULD be used for the textual encoding of a certificate. Implementations should be aware that in spite of this recommendation, many tools still default to encode certificates in this textual encoding with the extension ".cer".

This section does not disturb the official application/pkix-cert registration [RFC2585] in any way (which states that "each '.cer' file contains exactly one certificate, encoded in DER format"), but merely articulates a widespread, de facto alternative.
6. Textual Encoding of Certificate Revocation Lists

Certificate Revocation Lists (CRLs) are encoded using the "X509 CRL" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER (DER strongly preferred; see Appendix B) encoded ASN.1 CertificateList structure as described in Section 5 of [RFC5280].

-----BEGIN X509 CRL-----
MIIB9DCCAV8CAQEwCwYJKoZIhvcNAQEFAFMIBIDEXMBUSA1UEChMGeXNlZ2RvcCMB
A1UEChMWE0xJzBDczwtMDE6MDAwNzIzMGYxMTIzMDE6MDAwNzIzMGYxMTIzM4GCCy
GSI1UHSF0KGMpOTgxHjAcBgNVBAsTFlZlcmlTaWduIFRydXN0IE5ldHdvcmsxRjBE
BEBgNVBAgTB24wDgYIKwYBBQUHAwEAWgYIKwYBBQUHAwIGMA8GA1UdEwEB/wQFMAM
C3MMEQYJKoZIhvcNAQEFBAgKCGZwlyQ+0pOB7cKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1
IMIzhvQvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I
8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWz
YvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tc
KCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1
I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWz
YvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tc
KCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1
I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWz
YvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tc
KCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1
I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWz
YvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tcKCIeBOU1I8wvWzYvM5tc
-----END X509 CRL-----

Figure 8: CRL Example

Historically, the label "CRL" has rarely been used. Today, it is not common and many popular tools do not understand the label. Therefore, this document standardizes "X509 CRL" in order to promote interoperability and backwards-compatibility. Generators conforming to this document MUST generate "X509 CRL" labels and MUST NOT generate "CRL" labels. Parsers SHOULD NOT treat "CRL" as equivalent to "X509 CRL".
7. Textual Encoding of PKCS #10 Certification Request Syntax

PKCS #10 Certification Requests are encoded using the "CERTIFICATE REQUEST" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER (DER strongly preferred; see Appendix B) encoded ASN.1 CertificationRequest structure as described in [RFC2986].

-----BEGIN CERTIFICATE REQUEST-----
MIIBWDCCAQcCAQAwTjELMAkGA1UEBhMCU0UxJzAlBgNVBAoTHlNpbW9uIEpv2VcM
3Nvb1BEYXhRa29uc3VsdCBQQjEWMQGA1UEAxMNam9zZWZzc29uLm9yZzBOMBAG
ByqGSM49AgEBSuBAAAhAzoABLLPSkuXY0166MBxVJ3Mot5FCFuqofn6dT59/CM
E01SwVeH7tj56kj9R/j9O+Lfyx8SF015p3oGIwYAYJKoZIhvcNAQkOMVWUtAY
BgNHREEETAPgglq3N12zNaDb24ub3JnMwGA1udEwEB/wQCMAAwDwYDR0PAQH/
BAUDAwegADWqVHSEf16DDAKBggrBgEFBQcDATAKBggqhkjOPQDDAgM/ADA8
AhxVfxxhPFfBb8l1NcFmCUzOFAPEuQVUw3ZP69AhwWXk3dgSUsKnuwL5g/ftAY
dEQc8B8JAcnu0orU
-----END CERTIFICATE REQUEST-----

Figure 9: PKCS #10 Example

The label "NEW CERTIFICATE REQUEST" is also in wide use. Generators conforming to this document MUST generate "CERTIFICATE REQUEST" labels. Parsers MAY treat "NEW CERTIFICATE REQUEST" as equivalent to "CERTIFICATE REQUEST".

8. Textual Encoding of PKCS #7 Cryptographic Message Syntax

PKCS #7 Cryptographic Message Syntax structures are encoded using the "PKCS7" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER-encoded ASN.1 ContentInfo structure as described in [RFC2315].

-----BEGIN PKCS7-----
MIHjBgsqhkiG9w0BCRABF6CB0zCB0AIBAFho18CAQQGwYJKoZIhvaNAQUMMA4E
C1frI6dr0qUWAgITIDjBgsqhkIG9w0BCRACATAUBgghkiG9w0DBwQ1ZpECRvtz
u5kEGDCjerXy8odQ7EEEromZjVwAurk/j81IrozBSBqgkhkiG9w0BBwEwMwYLKoZI
hvcNAQkQAvw8jDAQgkqhkiG9w0DBwQ10tCteU09nxrD6AQKwYBBQUIAQIFIAAQ
OsGYUFdAH0RNC1p4VbKEAQUM2Xo8PMHoYdqEc8bTodlCFAZH4=
-----END PKCS7-----

Figure 10: PKCS #7 Example

The label "CERTIFICATE CHAIN" has been in use to denote a degenerate PKCS #7 structure that contains only a list of certificates (see Section 9 of [RFC2315]). Several modern tools do not support this label. Generators MUST NOT generate the "CERTIFICATE CHAIN" label. Parsers SHOULD NOT treat "CERTIFICATE CHAIN" as equivalent to "PKCS7".
PKCS #7 is an old specification that has long been superseded by CMS [RFC5652]. Implementations SHOULD NOT generate PKCS #7 when CMS is an alternative.

9. Textual Encoding of Cryptographic Message Syntax

Cryptographic Message Syntax structures are encoded using the "CMS" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER-encoded ASN.1 ContentInfo structure as described in [RFC5652].

-----BEGIN CMS-----
MIGDBgshkkiG9w0BCRABCaB0MHICAQAwDQYLKoZIhvcNAQkQAwgwXgYJKoZIhvcN
AQcBoFEET3icc87PK0nNK9EnSxItVioSa0o0S/I5czMs1ZIzkgsKK4tsQ0N1nUM
dvb050X15XLPLeTvIMwvVLWwEOsKlFIVHAqSk3MBkkBAJv0Fx0=
-----END CMS-----

Figure 11: CMS Example

CMS is the IETF successor to PKCS #7. Section 1.1.1 of [RFC5652] describes the changes since PKCS #7 v1.5. Implementations SHOULD generate CMS when it is an alternative, promoting interoperability and forwards-compatibility.

10. One Asymmetric Key and the Textual Encoding of PKCS #8 Private Key Info

Unencrypted PKCS #8 Private Key Information Syntax structures (PrivateKeyInfo), renamed to Asymmetric Key Packages (OneAsymmetricKey), are encoded using the "PRIVATE KEY" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER (DER preferred; see Appendix B) encoded ASN.1 PrivateKeyInfo structure as described in PKCS #8 [RFC5208], or a OneAsymmetricKey structure as described in [RFC5958]. The two are semantically identical and can be distinguished by version number.

-----BEGIN PRIVATE KEY-----
MIGEAgEAMBAGByqGSM49AgEGBSuBBAAKBG0wawIBAQQgVcB/UNPxalR9zDYAyjQIf
jojUDiQGnSjrFEEzZFT/92hRANCAASc7UJtqgf/abqWm60T3XNjExBv5ez9TdwK
HOM6xpM2q+53wsN/eYldgjQgBd3DBmHtPilCkiFICXyaA8z9LkJ
-----END PRIVATE KEY-----

Figure 12: PKCS #8 PrivateKeyInfo (OneAsymmetricKey) Example
11. Textual Encoding of PKCS #8 Encrypted Private Key Info

Encrypted PKCS #8 Private Key Information Syntax structures (EncryptedPrivateKeyInfo), called the same in [RFC5958], are encoded using the "ENCRYPTED PRIVATE KEY" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER (DER preferred; see Appendix B) encoded ASN.1 EncryptedPrivateKeyInfo structure as described in PKCS #8 [RFC5208] and [RFC5958].

-----BEGIN ENCRYPTED PRIVATE KEY-----
MIHNMEAGCSqGSIb3DQEFDTAzMBsGCSqGSIb3DQEFDDA0BAGhhIAC6T/51QICCAAw
FAYIKoZIhvcNAwEcBCxGgVzI59i9BGIY3CAqlMNByaI59i9IpiNnIiEiEsWZ0JIoHyRmKK/+cr9QPInxzImp0TR9s41mG3C11zTWvb0j1vbG3hu0zyFPracMkap
8eRzWiC5SVe1+CSJo2s2mVS87cyJ1d+txmrX0VYDE+eTgMLbrLmsWh3QkCTRtF
QC7k0NNzUHTV9yGQdflqMbwa=
-----END ENCRYPTED PRIVATE KEY-----

Figure 13: PKCS #8 EncryptedPrivateKeyInfo Example

12. Textual Encoding of Attribute Certificates

Attribute certificates are encoded using the "ATTRIBUTE CERTIFICATE" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER (DER strongly preferred; see Appendix B) encoded ASN.1 AttributeCertificate structure as described in [RFC5755].

-----BEGIN ATTRIBUTE CERTIFICATE-----
MIICKzCCAZQCAQEwz2egz2QwgYmgkYYwqYMXCzAJBgNVBAYTA1VTMREwDwYDVQQI
DAh0ZXgW9yazEUlBIGAIUEBwLU3vbnkgQnJvbb2sxDzANBgNVBAoMBkNTTRU5
MjE6MDgGA1UEAwwUX2NvdHQgU3RhbbGxlci91bWFpbEFkZ1H1c3M9c3N0YWxsZXJZ
aWMuc3VunXvJLmVkdQIGARwrgUUSoIQGMMIGIpIGGMDQswCQYDVQQGEwJUzER
MA8GA1UEAwEBTImV3I4ZvemnxFDASBQIY3k0b255IEyb29rMQ8wDQYDVQQK
DAZDU0U1OTIxOjA4BgNVBAoMC1N0b255IEJyb29rMR8wDQYDVQQG
n3DfoCBgGA1UWLYzBMGAAZjSaAGAwgBAGAA8z
OTA3MDIwMTA1MDAwF3YzDz95MTExMDUwMDAwWjArMckGA1UESIE1mCCG4m
0dIA6y9pZGyyYXNobi2vcmcvA5kZXr5JHtbaDANBkgkhiG90BAQUFABQgQAV
M9axFPXoxEFCer06bj9mC6BCQQLTA7ZXCJzcxyva7xvCbdmtZXPRUuHf50WPJz
5Xpus/x9Wbg4M3fIdIKNyO8RsM6cx+PG1I1C7ZpZiGmCYL164LAEGPO/bsw
Smluak1aZIttePeTAHeJJ8izN5a3Wcd3A5gLzQ==
-----END ATTRIBUTE CERTIFICATE-----

Figure 14: Attribute Certificate Example
13. Textual Encoding of Subject Public Key Info

Public keys are encoded using the "PUBLIC KEY" label. The encoded data MUST be a BER (DER preferred; see Appendix B) encoded ASN.1 SubjectPublicKeyInfo structure as described in Section 4.1.2.7 of [RFC5280].

-----BEGIN PUBLIC KEY-----
MHYwEAYHKoZIzj0CAQYFK4EEACIDYgAEn1LlwLN/KBYQRVH6fIMTzfEqJ0VztLe
klchp2hi78cCaMY81FB1ys8J917krc+M4aBeCGYFjba+hiXttJWPl7yd1E+5UG4U
Nkn3Eos8ElZByi9DVsyfy9eejh+8AXgp
-----END PUBLIC KEY-----

Figure 15: Subject Public Key Info Example

14. Security Considerations

Data in this format often originates from untrusted sources, thus parsers must be prepared to handle unexpected data without causing security vulnerabilities.

Implementers building implementations that rely on canonical representation or the ability to fingerprint a particular data object need to understand that this document does not define canonical encodings. The first ambiguity is introduced by permitting the text-encoded representation instead of the binary BER or DER encodings, but further ambiguities arise when multiple labels are treated as similar. Variations of whitespace and non-base64 alphabetic characters can create further ambiguities. Data encoding ambiguities also create opportunities for side channels. If canonical encodings are desired, the encoded structure must be decoded and processed into a canonical form (namely, DER encoding).

15. References

15.1. Normative References


15.2. Informative References


Appendix A. Non-conforming Examples

This appendix contains examples for the non-recommended label variants described earlier in this document. As discussed earlier, supporting these is not required and is sometimes discouraged. Still, they can be useful for interoperability testing and for easy reference.

-----BEGIN X509 CERTIFICATE-----
MIIBHDCBxaADAgECAgIcxzAjBgcqkhkJOPQMBBAxjAMBgNVBAMVBLSVghMB4X
DTE0MDkxNDA2MTU1MFowEDEOMAwGA1UEAxQFUEtJWCEw
WTATBgchjkJOPQIBBggqkhkJOPQMBBWvNCAAATwoQSr863Qr0PoRIYQ96H7WykePh
Fa0eVAE2bth43wCNc+U5a2761dhGhSSJkWVRgVH5+prLiR+nfifq+x4oxAwDjAM
BqNVHRMBAf8EAjAAMAKGBgYMQSM49BAEDRwAwAIfMdKS5F631MnWvhi?uaKJzKcs
NnYjOkgBex6MIEAv2AhAI2GdvlF+mgVhypoPZE+JxRxWChmggb5/9eHdUcmW/jkOH
-----END X509 CERTIFICATE-----

Figure 16: Non-standard 'X509' Certificate Example

-----BEGIN X.509 CERTIFICATE-----
MIIBHDCBxaADAgECAgIcxzAjBgcqkhkJOPQMBBAxjAMBgNVBAMVBLSVghMB4X
DTE0MDkxNDA2MTU1MFowEDEOMAwGA1UEAxQFUEtJWCEw
WTATBgchjkJOPQIBBggqkhkJOPQMBBWvNCAAATwoQSr863Qr0PoRIYQ96H7WykePh
Fa0eVAE2bth43wCNc+U5a2761dhGhSSJkWVRgVH5+prLiR+nfifq+x4oxAwDjAM
BqNVHRMBAf8EAjAAMAKGBgYMQSM49BAEDRwAwAIfMdKS5F631MnWvhi?uaKJzKcs
NnYjOkgBex6MIEAv2AhAI2GdvlF+mgVhypoPZE+JxRxWChmggb5/9eHdUcmW/jkOH
-----END X.509 CERTIFICATE-----

Figure 17: Non-standard 'X.509' Certificate Example

-----BEGIN NEW CERTIFICATE REQUEST-----
MIIBWDCQcCAQAwTjELMAkGA1UEBhMCU0UxJzAlBgNVBAoTHlNpbW9uIEpvc2Vz
DTE0MDkxNDA2MTU1MFowEDEOMAwGA1UEAxQFUEtJWCEw
WTATBgchjkJOPQIBBggqkhkJOPQMBBWvNCAAATwoQSr863Qr0PoRIYQ96H7WykePh
Fa0eVAE2bth43wCNc+U5a2761dhGhSSJkWVRgVH5+prLiR+nfifq+x4oxAwDjAM
BqNVHRMBAf8EAjAAMAKGBgYMQSM49BAEDRwAwAIfMdKS5F631MnWvhi?uaKJzKcs
NnYjOkgBex6MIEAv2AhAI2GdvlF+mgVhypoPZE+JxRxWChmggb5/9eHdUcmW/jkOH
-----END NEW CERTIFICATE REQUEST-----

Figure 18: Non-standard 'NEW' PKCS #10 Example
-----BEGIN CERTIFICATE CHAIN-----
MIHjBgsqhkiG9w0BCRBABF6CBOzCB0AIABADFho18CAQCCgGwYJKoZIhvcmNAQUMMA4E
Clfri6dr0gUWAgiTidDAjBGsgqhhkiG9w0BCRADCmUBggqhhkiG9w0DBwQIzMECRWtzu
5kEgDCjexYI8odQ7ZEEgromZjYvAurk/j8I1rozBIg6qkhkiG9w0BBwEwYLAoZIhvcNAQkQAw8WJDABgghkiG9w0DBwQI0tCBoU09nxEwDAYIKwYBBQUAIAQ2o+E
-----END CERTIFICATE CHAIN-----

Figure 19: Non-standard 'CERTIFICATE CHAIN' Example

Appendix B. DER Expectations

This appendix is informative. Consult the respective standards for the normative rules.

DER is a restricted profile of BER [X.690]; thus, all DER encodings of data values are BER encodings, but just one of the BER encodings is the DER encoding for a data value. Canonical encoding matters when performing cryptographic operations; additionally, canonical encoding has certain efficiency advantages for parsers. There are three principal reasons to encode with DER:

1. A digital signature is (supposed to be) computed over the DER encoding of the semantic content, so providing anything other than the DER encoding is senseless. (In practice, an implementer might choose to have an implementation parse and digest the data as is, but this practice amounts to guesswork.)

2. In practice, cryptographic hashes are computed over the DER encoding for identification.

3. In practice, the content is small. DER always encodes data values in definite-length form (where the length is stated at the beginning of the encoding); thus, a parser can anticipate memory or resource usage up front.
Figure 20 matches the structures in this document with the particular reasons for DER encoding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sec.</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CERTIFICATE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X509 CRL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CERTIFICATE REQUEST</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PKCS7</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CMS</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PRIVATE KEY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>ENCRYPTED PRIVATE KEY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ATTRIBUTE CERTIFICATE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>PUBLIC KEY</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Cryptographic Message Syntax is designed for content of any length; indefinite-length encoding enables one-pass processing (streaming) when generating the encoding. Only certain parts -- namely, signed and authenticated attributes -- need to be DER encoded.

Although not always "small", these encoded structures should not be particularly "large" (e.g., more than 16 kilobytes). The parser ought to be informed of large things up front in any event; this is yet another reason to DER encode these things in the first place.

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Peter Gutmann suggested to document labels for Attribute Certificates and PKCS #7 messages, and to add examples for the non-standard variants. Dr. Stephen Henson suggested distinguishing when BER versus DER is appropriate or necessary.
Authors’ Addresses

Simon Josefsson
SJD AB
Johan Olof Wallins Vaeg 13
Solna 171 64
Sweden
EMail: simon@josefsson.org
URI: http://josefsson.org/

Sean Leonard
Penango, Inc.
5900 Wilshire Boulevard
21st Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90036
United States
EMail: dev+ietf@seantek.com
URI: http://www.penango.com/