

Security and Standard C Libraries

Martyn Lovell
Visual C++ Libraries
Microsoft Corporation

2003.04.17

1

Agenda

- Current Situation
- Security Problems
- Library impact
- Proposed Changes
- Related C++ issues
- Summary
- Q&A

2003.04.17

2

Libraries Background

- Standard C Library initially evolved with Unix™
 - Starting in 1970s
 - Public networking uncommon
 - Machines simpler, more constrained
- First C language/library standard codified existing practice
 - High degree of compatibility with current use
 - Core set of required functions for C programmers

2003.04.17

3

Current situation

- Public networking extremely common
- Motivated attackers common
 - Direct hacking
 - Social engineering (malicious spam)
- Firewalls not enough to protect network software
 - Laptops move in and out of firewall
 - Wireless networks allow promiscuous binding

2003.04.17

4

Security implications

- Security is now critical for the whole software industry
- Much code that was previously unimportant now vulnerable to attack
- Assume every software component might be attacked
- Security issues require urgent attention
 - Software vendors issuing patches regularly
 - Locked-down customers need to deploy updates or workarounds

2003.04.17

5

Improving the Situation

- Short Term
 - Be responsive
 - Have great security process
- Medium Term
 - Threat modelling
 - Security review
 - Defense in depth
 - Defaulting to security

2003.04.17

6

Improving the Situation

- Long term
 - Development improvements
 - Better libraries
 - Better coding practices
 - Better development standards
 - Better trained developers
 - Better quality assurance
 - No single panacea
 - Standard C Libraries a core part of this plan
 - Need to make breaking changes
 - Help drive improvements across all deployed code

2003.04.17

7

Key security problems

- Buffer overruns
- Error reporting
- Parameter validation
- File access rights
- Static buffer results

2003.04.17

8

Security issues

- Standard-defined interface problems
 - Function shape is dangerous
 - New function needed
- Standard-defined implementation problems
 - Function requirements are dangerous
 - Existing function can change
- Standard-agnostic implementation problems
 - Standard change not required, may be useful

2003.04.17

9

Standard Interface problems

- Lack of buffer size
 - fgets
- Lack of error return
 - Continue after error can be attackable
- Callback context needed
 - Avoid static variables
 - Safe for reentrancy, threads
 - qsort, bsearch

2003.04.17

10

Standard interface problems

- Never use static result buffers
 - Can overrun
 - tmpnam
- Random number quality
 - Can allow predictable attacks
 - New name since different performance
 - Rand

2003.04.17

11

Standard implementation problems

- Returning unterminated strings
 - Predictable, but hard to get right
 - Strncpy

2003.04.17

12

Quality of Implementation issues

- Parameter validation
 - Ensure errors reported
 - Provide way to catch errors
 - We will have handler function
 - assert in “debug” build
- Stack usage
 - Avoid excessive usage
 - Stack overflow can be a denial of service attack

2003.04.17

13

Quality of Implementation issues

- File permissions
 - Create temporary files safely
 - Create all files by default with good permissions
- Scanf
 - No totally safe way to implement this
 - Consider requiring buffer sizes
- Long file path support
 - Don’t fail when given extended paths
 - Windows specific

2003.04.17

14

Our Secure Libraries

- Reviewing all 2000 C and C++ library functions
 - Includes many MS extensions
- Creating around 400 secure variants
- Variants follow secure coding rules
- Will not make an application secure
 - But will help build one
 - Removes need for user to build secure replacements

2003.04.17

15

Our secure libraries

- Give the developer option to deprecate insecure functions
 - Deprecate by default
 - `__declspec(deprecate)` in VC++
 - Causes a compiler warning
 - Allow deprecation to be removed
 - Using a `#define`
 - Makes us secure by default

2003.04.17

16

Example

- **Old:**
 - `size_t mbstowcs`
(
 `wchar_t *wcstr,`
 `const char *mbstr,`
 `size_t count`
)
);
- **New:**
 - `errcode mbstowcs_s`
(
 `size_t *pConvertedMChars,`
 `wchar_t *wcstr,`
 `size_t sizeInWords,`
 `const char *mbstr,`
 `size_t count`
)
);

2003.04.17

17

Scope of changes

- Most functions change implementation
 - For validation
 - For quality of implementation issues
- 37 functions have some interface shape change
 - Not time to review them all here
 - Details in my paper proposal
 - List on next page

2003.04.17

18

Functions changing

- `bsearch`, `qsort`
 - Pass context
- `tmpnam`, `getenv`, `strtok`, `ctime`
 - Don't use static state
- `rand`
 - Crypto-safe
- `fgets`, `gets`, `vsprintf`, `strerror`, `strncat`, `Wcsncat`, `strncpy`, `wcsncpy`, `wcstombs`, `mbstowcs`
 - Buffer size

2003.04.17

19

Functions changing

- `memcpy`, `wmemcpy`, `memmove`, `wmemmove`
 - Separate dest size
- `fscanf`, `scanf`, `wscanf`, `sscanf`, `swscanf`
 - `scanf` family problems
- `setbuf`, `sprintf`, `strcat`, `strcpy`, `wscat`, `wscopy`
 - Deprecate
 - Better versions already in standard

2003.04.17

20

Secure Libraries Questions

- Deprecate by default?
- Integer multiplication
- Naming convention
 - mbstowcs (old)
 - mbstowcs_s (new) OR
 - mbstowcsn (new)
- Change names always, or only for interface changes
 - Non-interface changes include more rigorous validation
- Error return
 - Provide alternative error mechanisms
- scanf family

2003.04.17

21

C++ Library

- Early stages of planning
- Less changes required
 - Newer library
 - Less direct buffer manipulation
- Existing fixes
 - operator << into char []
 - Replace with alternative mechanism
 - Validation
 - Bounds checking
 - Quality of implementation issues
 - Other small changes

2003.04.17

22

C++ Library (2)

- New classes
 - Secret buffer
 - Erases after use
 - alloca replacement
 - size-checked stack array
 - Overrun detection wrappers
 - Path handling
 - URL
 - Disk

2003.04.17

23

Summary

- Time to make the C library secure
- Help developers move their code forward to secure practices
- Exemplar implementation being built now
 - Will be available for trialing/review soon
 - My dev team is building right now

2003.04.17

24

Questions?

- Follow-up:
 - MartynL@microsoft.com