CWE User Experience Working Group Meeting

August 28, 2024



Agenda

This meeting is being recorded :-)

Primary topics

- CWE User Interviews
- Buffer Overflow Definition and Usage
- Open Discussion
- Reminders and Adjourn



Topic 1

CWE User Interviews

Chris Coffin



CWE User Interview Guide

- Developed a User interview guide to gather feedback from prospective user groups
- Previously received some feedback from UEWG members on how to improve

CWE - User Interview Guide

Research Questions

- What are the main usability issues users encounter when using the CWE w-ebsite?
 - Are users able to easily navigate to the information they need to accomplish their goals?
 - Do users find the content and language to be useful, insightful, and actionable?

Warm Up

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- To begin, could you tell me briefly about your role? What do you do?
- · How long have you been in your role for?

Overall Experience

- Can you walk me through your experience with the CWE website?
- What information are you typically looking for? How quickly are you able to find that information? Is there anything you try to look for but is missing or hard to find?
- What situations have you used the CWE website for? Can you tell us about a recent one?
 - o What did you like the most/least about your experience? Why?
 - What information from the website was the most helpful? How did you use the information?
 - What difficulties did you encounter? What would have made it easier to accomplish your specific task?
- What are your common frustrations when using the CWE website?
- What would we need to change for you to use the CWE website more?



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CWE User Interviews

- Identified and emailed an initial set of users from the CWE community to participate in a live interview based on the User Interview Guide
- We may expand the interviews to a broader set of users
- Are any UEWG members interested in participating and sharing their experience with using the CWE website?
 - Participation could include a live interview or by filling out the User Interview Guide



Topic 2

Buffer Overflow Definition, Usage, and Handling Terminology Differences

Chris Coffin / Steve Christey Coley



Inconsistent Usage of "Buffer Overflow" Term

- The "buffer overflow" term has been used for decades
- Yet there isn't a single definition that's shared by everybody using it
 - If somebody reports an issue using definition X and a user reads the report but assumes definition Y, confusion or inconsistency can result
- This has CWE usability implications... especially if CWE uses the term
- Example of different usages (operation and position)
 - WRITE < past the end > of a buffer
 - WRITE < before the beginning> *or* < past the end> of a buffer
 - WRITE or READ < past the end > of a buffer
 - WRITE or READ <before the beginning> *or* <past the end> of a buffer
- How many people in this call do NOT use the first interpretation?



Results from a 2-Year-Old Twitter Poll

- Audience: heavy software security, exploit writing, vuln management
- About 30% did <NOT> define "buffer overflow" as only writing past the end of a buffer
- About 25% included "read" in their definition

Steve Christey Coley, BS @ SushiDude · Oct 18, Poll: for those who know the "buffer overflow" term you? I'm curious about something. If you have anoth (RT for reach? thanks)	n, what does it mean to
Write past end of buffer	68.6%
Write before/after buf	8.3%
read write after end	12.4%
r w before/after buf	10.7%
169 votes · Final results	



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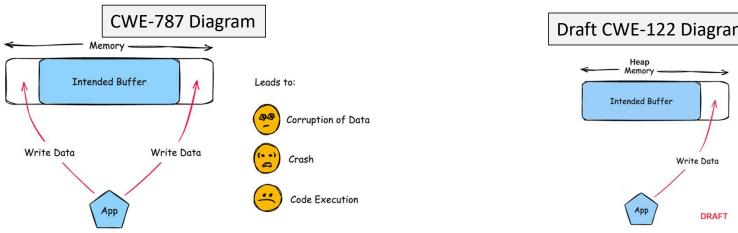
Inconsistent Usage "In the Wild"

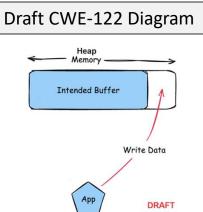
- In early CWE days, multiple code analysis tool vendors said that their tools do not distinguish between before/after, or do not distinguish between read/write
- The famous "AddressSanitizer" tool from Google flags any out-ofbounds accesses, but it reports "heap-buffer-overflow" and "stackbuffer-overflow" – but no "underflows"
 - (there are many vague terms from AddressSanitizer that just get copy/pasted into CVE descriptions)
- CWE sometimes uses the "overflow" term in names or descriptions
- We are running into this inconsistency as we make usability improvements (micro-changes) to CWE names, descriptions, and supporting images



Looking at CWE-122

- One of the most frequently-accessed CWEs on cwe.mitre.org
- **CWE-122: Heap-based Buffer Overflow**
 - "A heap overflow condition is a buffer overflow, where the buffer that can be overwritten is allocated in the heap portion of memory..."
 - Child of CWE-787: Out-of-bounds Write
 - "The product writes data past the end, or before the beginning, of the intended buffer."







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Use of CWE-122 "in the wild"

- At least one CVE for a "heap underflow" was mapped to CWE-122 by a CNA experienced in CWE mapping
- AddressSanitizer probably can't distinguish between past-the-end or before-the-beginning, and some other tools probably don't either
- Using the "read or write" interpretation mapping an "underflow" to CWE-122 would be correct
- Where would "heap underflow" get mapped the more-general CWE-787? Should a new entry be created?
- CWE-124: Buffer Underwrite ('Buffer Underflow')
 - desc specifies a write "prior to the beginning of the buffer," but not "heap" or "stack"
- CWE's own language is inconsistent
 - "out-of-bounds" is used for writes, reads (CWE-125/CWE-126), "outside the buffer's intended boundary" (CWE-119)
- CWE's own buffer-overflow model has some gaps and overlap
 - E.g. CWE-788: Access of Memory Location After End of Buffer



Discussion: What to Do?

- Note: some CWE reorganization will be needed regardless; this discussion is focused only on terminology
- Challenge: most users will not consider CWE's own definition if they are already familiar with a term
- Proposal 1: since most people interpret "buffer overflow" as "write past the end of the buffer" – use this term when applicable
 - This is more usable for most people, but loses technical accuracy for experts, exploit writers, and tool vendors
- Proposal 2: Avoid using "buffer overflow" in names and descriptions, and use lessambiguous "read/write" for "before/after" the buffer
 - More technically accurate and precise and reduces ambiguity, but does not use language that many people are familiar with
- Alternate terms / glossary could be updated when needed
- CWE-122, CWE-121 (stack-based overflow), CWE-120 ("classic" buffer overflow) and others might need modification



It's Not Just Buffer Overflows

- We will likely run into this issue as we move through CWE for simplification
- (opinion) CWE cannot force consistent, correct terminology, but CWE must support people using CWE with different uses of the same terminology
- Other examples
 - Integer "wrap" (wraparound) and "overflow" are technically distinct
 - "Stack overflow" could be stack exhaustion or stack-based buffer overflow
 - "memory leak" could be not freeing memory after use, or disclosing the contents of memory
 - "Named callable" formally-defined CWE term used in some standards that generalizes concepts like functions, procedures, subroutines, etc.
 - "Neutralization" and other terms that CWE had to "invent"
 - IDOR/BOLA



Topic 3

Open Discussion

Chris Coffin



Next Meeting – September 25 @ 12pm

PLEASE CONTACT WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR THOUGHTS

CWE@MITRE.ORG



Backups



What's new in CWE Release 4.15?

- First installment of major usability improvements that are underway to enhance the understandability, navigability, and usability of CWE content
- 15 CWE Entry pages now include a concise summary of the weakness along with a visual aid at the top of each entry page
 - These 15 CWEs were selected based on their inclusion in the CWE top 25 list
 - Full list can be found at: https://cwe.mitre.org/news/archives/news2024.html#july16 CWE Version 4.15 Now Av ailable
- The Alternate Terms, Common Consequences, and Mitigations sections were reordered so that they appear directly below the new summary section



Open Discussion Topics?

• Increase motivations to fix weaknesses versus vulnerabilities

 Could we find a way to incorporate cost and expense associated with a weakness into CWE?

What CWE personas most benefit from weakness visualizations?

- Technical writers and security architects whose audience is less technical could benefit from reusing visualizations
- New or junior level Software or Hardware developers could better understand security issues in visual form
- CWE persona for technical manager?



Usability: Macro- and Micro-Level Review

Macro –

- How to organize weaknesses at structural, site-wide level?
 - Organizing Views
- Site-wide navigation

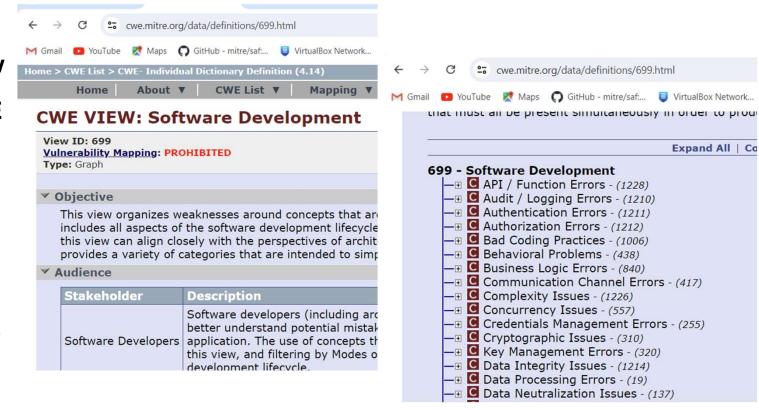
Micro –

- How to define a weakness understandably/accurately
- Remove redundant and unnecessary information
 - Moving information to a better place
- Better leverage the schema



View and Category IDs

- Discussions around removing View and/or Category CWE IDs from page (under title) to prevent mappings
- Already removed IDs from titles
- IDs will still be used in URL





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Other Macro Changes?

Any other thoughts or ideas on Macro usability changes?



UEWG: Purpose

- Mission: Identifying areas where CWE content, rules, guidelines, and best practices must improve to better support stakeholder community, and work collaboratively to fix them
- Periodic reporting of activities to CWE Board
 - Next quarterly Board meeting TBD Q2-2024
- Please solicit participation from your contacts
 - Contact: <u>cwe@mitre.org</u>



Housekeeping

- CWE UEWG May Meeting
 - The next regularly scheduled meeting is Wed 7/31
- The CWE Program is continuously seeking feedback on UEWG activities and priorities during these sessions or via email: cwe@mitre.org



Usability Task Micro Updates Initial Goals

Above the fold (before the webpage scroll point):

 Important and concise text is above the fold so the reader can easily scan and digest

Points to Make Above the Fold:

- Describe just the weakness and provide a visual aid
 - Concise summary of weakness (only in description, no extended description)
 - Describe the condition and some context about the condition
 - Concise is 3 4 sentences. Images will provide additional context.

Reorder Elements:

- Alternate Terms
- Consequences Element (bad outcomes)
- Mitigations Element (what to do about the weakness)
- Remaining Elements follow



Prioritizing User Experience Improvements

User Experience Working Group was established in response to negative feedback related to CWE's usability

- This group has accomplished much in response (e.g., submission guidelines, mapping guidance, "New to CWE?" launch, weakness filtering)
- We must now begin to address usability and understandability in further ways throughout the corpus structure and down to individual weakness language

CWE entry clean-up (across the entire corpus)

- <u>Understandability</u>: revising all entries for simpler language; remove redundancy
- Simplifying descriptions/extended descriptions to leverage other elements appropriately
 - E.g., removing example instance, impacts, etc. language from descriptions
 - Only having one description written in concise, accurate language focusing on the weakness
- Completeness: ensuring all entries have basic required elements populated
- <u>Visualizations</u>: adding to entries to explain topics visually (leverage Abhi's top25 examples, build from there)



Usability: Macro- and Micro-Level

Macro –

- How to organize weaknesses at structural, site-wide level?
 - Organizing Views
- Site-wide navigation

Micro –

- How to define a weakness understandably/accurately
- Remove redundant and unnecessary information
- Better leverage the schema



CWE-89: Improper Neutralization of Special Elements used in an SQL Command ('SQL Injection')

Weakness ID: 89

Abstraction: Base Structure: Simple

▼ Description

The product constructs all or part of an SQL command using externally-influenced input from an upstream component, but it does not neutralize or incorrectly neutralizes special elements that could modify the intended SQL command when it is sent to a downstream component.

Extended Description

Without sufficient removal or quoting of SQL syntax in user-controllable inputs, the generated SOL guery can cause those inputs to be interpreted as SOL instead of ordinary user data. This can be used to alter query logic to bypass security checks, or to insert additional statements that modify the back-end database, possibly including execution of system commands.

SQL injection has become a common issue with database-driven web sites. The flaw is easily detected, and easily exploited, and as such, any site or product package with even a minimal user base is likely to be subject to an attempted attack of this kind. This flaw depends on the fact that SQL makes no real distinction between the control and data planes.

▼ Relationships

▼ Relevant to the view "Research Concepts" (CWE-1000)

Nature	Туре	ID	Name
ChildOf	0	943	Improper Neutralization of Special Elements in Data Query Logic
<u>ParentOf</u>	V	564	SQL Injection: Hibernate
CanFollow	V	456	Missing Initialization of a Variable



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CWE-89: Improper Neutralization of Special Elements used in an SOL Command

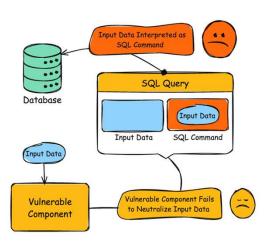
Weakness ID: 89

Usage for Mapping: ALLOWED (this CWE ID may be used to map to real-world vulnerabilities)

Abstraction: Base

▼ Description

The product uses user-controllable input to construct an SQL command incorrectly or without neutralizing its special elements. This can cause inputs to be interpreted as SQL code instead of ordinary user data. This weakness depends on the fact that SQL makes no real distinction between the control and data planes.



✓ Alternate Terms

'SOL Injection'

▼ Common Consequences

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Scope	Impact
Confidentiality	Technical Impact: Read Application Data A user could construct an SQL command to reveal sensitive information stored in a database

Overall Prioritization

- At what level should we begin our focus?
- Macro (CWE organization and navigation) vs Micro level (weakness understandability)
- Micro could include CWE record:
 - Understandability
 - Completeness
 - Visualizations



A possible path forward

- Discuss a single CWE and how we could improve usability by
 - Merging the description and extended descriptions
 - Removing redundant information
 - Moving information that belongs in other parts of the schema
 - Removing vulnerability specific information
- We could walk though one example in the meeting
- Would anyone be interested in trying this exercise with another CWE on their own
 - Could present their results in the next meeting



Topic 2

New to CWE Updates

Chris Coffin



Prioritizing User Experience Improvements

- To come: New Strategy and Implementation Plan for usability improvements across CWE corpus aligned to required elements and their requirements as outlined in CWE content suggestion guidelines
- Community partners in UEWG are invited to help us tackle this important work
 - More intentional focus in UEWG
 - CWE Content Web Submission Form for suggested mods on any weakness
 - Content Development Repository (CDR), GitHub repo for community collaboration is coming soon and will provide transparent, collaborative platform on which to work



Recent Discussions on SW Licensing Issues

- Since November, a resurrection of debate around SW licensing issues being in/out of CWE scope on the CWE-Research email listserv
- In 2018, it was determined that "improper licensing" was outside of CWE's scope
 - Rationale: Impact to software and its usage not through the technical exploitation of a software security weakness in architecture, design, or code. Rather, it is through policy/programmatic exploitation.
 - Availability concern comparable with supply chain issues where one disrupts a supplier to stop/limit a product from being delivered, and hence make it not available

Recent arguments are varied:

- Pro: Misusing SW licenses can negatively affect maintainability, availability
- Against: Invalid/Improper licenses cannot lead to a vulnerability
- Pro: CWE absorbed CQE content ~2018; improper licensing is a code quality issue
- Against: Licensing issues are not a property of SW, but of the society and economy around the SW



CWE Scope

CWE's definition of "Weakness":

- A condition in a software, firmware, hardware, or service component that, under certain circumstances, could contribute to the introduction of vulnerabilities
- Community members sometimes suggest new entries to CWE that do not satisfy this "weakness" definition, but they want CWE to treat them as "weaknesses"
- Other times, people effectively suggest the expansion of CWE's scope beyond "traditional" software/hardware
- "Scope exclusions" attempt to formalize decisions about what can or cannot be included in CWE as an official "weakness" entry
 - Have already been used in external submissions



New to CWE – Additional Examples

- The current New to CWE page has one example "CWE-798: Use of Hard-coded Credentials"
- More examples are needed
- Should be simple to understand to closely match the intended audience of the New to CWE page
- Examples for consideration?
 - Might focus on 2023 Top 25 CWEs?
 - CWE-434: Unrestricted Upload of File with Dangerous Type
 - CWE-287: Improper Authentication
 - Others?



New to CWE

Common Weakness Enumeration (CWE^{TM}) can be difficult to understand for the average person and can offers some tips on how to familiarize yourself with what CWE has to offer before more fully exploring the CWE Program, you have come to the right place.

What is CWE?

First, we should describe what CWE is. CWE is a community-developed list of common software and har is a condition in a software, firmware, hardware, or service component that, under certain circumstance conditions are in many cases introduced by the developer during development of the product.

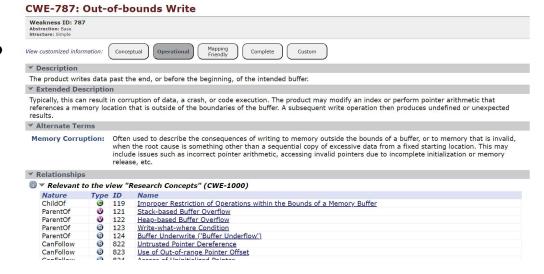
Even though developers may have vastly different coding practices, they are all capable of introducing t products. The <u>CWE List</u> and associated taxonomies and classification schemes serve as a language that

The best part is that CWE is free to use by any organization or individual for any research, development



New to CWE – Additional Examples – Selection Criteria (Continued)

- What CWE characteristics are important when determining the best examples for new CWE users?
- Is the description easy to understand for a non-developer or industry expert?
- Does it include good examples (demonstrative and observed)?
- Is it a well-known/well-understood weakness?
- Does it exist in the Top 25 list (now or previous years)?
- Others?





New to CWE Series – Future Topics

- The CWE team is considering developing additional documents as part of a "New to CWE" series
- Keep them short so that new and casual users can read quickly
- Each document would link to others in the series where appropriate
- Topics for consideration?
 - Categorization Views and Categories
 - How do I navigate the CWE corpus?
 - CWE Hierarchy Pillars, Classes, Bases, and Variants
 - Others?



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New to CWE Series – How to Navigate CWE

- The CVE -> CWE Mapping Guidance exists on the website today
- The Mapping Methodologies section of the guidance could be reused with some modification
 - Keyword search
 - Views
 - PDF Visualization
- The goal is to create a "New to CWE: How to Navigate CWE" document that could be referenced by the current "New to CWE" page that exists today



New to CWE

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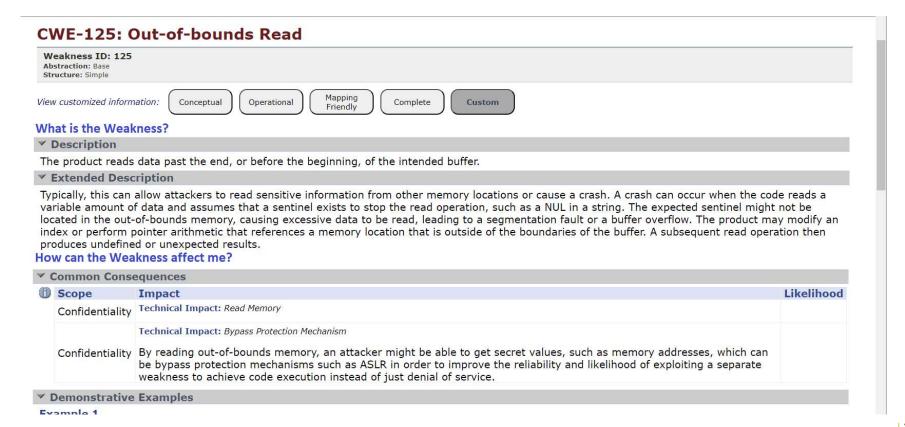
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CWE Element/Information Presentation – Mockup for New CWE Users





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CWE Element/Information Presentation – Mockup for New CWE Users

index or perform pointer arithmetic that references a memory location that is outside of the boundaries of the buffer. A subsequent read operation then produces undefined or unexpected results.

How does this Weakness relate to others?

▼ Relationships

■ Relevant to the view "Research Concepts" (CWE-1000)

Nature	Туре	ID	Name
ChildOf	0	119	Improper Restriction of Operations within the Bounds of a Memory Buffer
ParentOf	V	126	Buffer Over-read
ParentOf	V	127	Buffer Under-read
CanFollow	B	822	Untrusted Pointer Dereference
CanFollow	(3)	823	Use of Out-of-range Pointer Offset
CanFollow	(3)	824	Access of Uninitialized Pointer
CanFollow	(3)	825	Expired Pointer Dereference

■ Relevant to the view "Software Development" (CWE-699)

Nature	Type II) Name	
MemberOf	C 12	218 <u>Memory Buffer E</u>	rrors

- Relevant to the view "Weaknesses for Simplified Mapping of Published Vulnerabilities" (CWE-1003)
- Relevant to the view "CISQ Quality Measures (2020)" (CWE-1305)
- Relevant to the view "CISQ Data Protection Measures" (CWE-1340)

Where can I get more information?

▼ References

[REF-1034] Raoul Strackx, Yves Younan, Pieter Philippaerts, Frank Piessens, Sven Lachmund and Thomas Walter. "Breaking the memory secrecy assumption". ACM. 2009-03-31. https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/1519144.1519145. URL validated: 2023-04-07.

[REF-1035] Fermin J. Serna. "The info leak era on software exploitation". 2012-07-25. < https://media.blackhat.com/bh-us-13/Briefings/Serna/BULUS 13. Serna Leak Era Slides adds.



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Grouping CWEs



- CWE entries are currently "grouped" in different ways to provide useful subsets of the CWE corpus for different purposes:
 - <u>Views</u>: a subset of CWE entries that provides a way of examining CWE content. The two main view structures are Slices (flat lists) and Graphs (containing relationships between entries), examples include:
 - CWE-1194: Hardware Design
 - CWE-699: Software Development
 - CWE-1400: Comprehensive Categorization for Software Assurance Trends
 - CWE-1003: Weaknesses for Simplified Mapping of Published Vulnerabilities (NVD)
 - <u>Categories</u>: a CWE entry that contains a set of other entries that share a common characteristic. A
 category is not a weakness, but rather a structural item that helps users find weaknesses that share the
 stated common characteristic.
 - CWE-1199: General Circuit and Logic Design Concerns
 - − ~ Overall Hierarchy
 - <u>CWE-1000: Research Concepts</u> contains all CWE entries in one hierarchical structure



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Grouping CWEs, cont.

- What groupings are most useful to new or casual CWE users? Experienced users?
- How can groupings be better presented/discovered/identified to the user?
- Should new users be guided to groupings of CWEs for learning about CWE? (e.g., links in user stories)
- Are there additional groupings that we are missing? Too many?



CSV Single Colon Separators Within Column Data

- A double colon is used to separate csv fields/columns data, while a single colon is used to separate multi-value data within fields/columns
- The Observed Examples field contains Reference and link data that includes a url in some cases (colon within "http://...")
- Should a note be added to the download data that warns the user of this, or should we look into an alternative separator?
- Example taken from CWE CWE-41: Improper Resolution of Path Equivalence (4.12) (mitre.org)
 - ::REFERENCE:CVE-2000-1114:DESCRIPTION:Source code disclosure using trailing dot:LINK:https://www.cve.org/CVERecord?id=CVE-2000-1114::REFERENCE:CVE-2002-1986:DESCRIPTION:Source code disclosure using trailing



CWE User Pain Points

- Pain point topics that the group is aware of or would like to discuss
- For those on the call, what were your biggest questions or concerns when beginning to use CWE?
- Are there common questions that CWE users have that are not covered in the current FAQ?
- Other potential opportunities:
 - Features we could expand or improve to make CWE consumption easier?
 - Maybe engage the community in one or more ways to solicit this kind of feedback (see topic #3)
- Other thoughts?



Community Engagement Strategy

- Develop a strategy for engaging the CWE user community for feedback
- What are the best methods to query the community on topics such as the pain points covered in topic #2
- What communication methods should be employed?
 - E.g., polls, emails, web, social media
- Should we target specific user types?

Other thoughts?



CWE Video Tips Series

Current video ideas:

- How to search CWE for a weakness
- How to display only the information that you need with presentation filters
- What is a weakness (vs a vulnerability)
- How are weaknesses organized
- What is a category (how is it different than a pillar)
- What are views
- How and why to use the research view
- Use cases for CWE (could user stories be used?)
- How do I submit an idea for a new weakness
- How can I improve the quality of existing weaknesses



New to CWE – Future Content

- The New to CWE content audience is different from what has been catered to previously
- The audience is the casual or new user to CWE or even the manager who makes security funding decisions
- The team has previously drafted material for the New to CWE audience that covers the CWE hierarchy
 - Not yet released material
 - Do members agree that this topic should be covered for New to CWE?
- Are there other topics that UEWG members feel strongly about or believe should be covered given the intended audience?
- Should there be a close coupling of the topics covered here with the CWE Video Tips series?



CWE Naming and Vulnerability Mapping

- Being thinking about solutions for common and well-known issues surrounding use of CWE names and how to more easily map vulnerabilities to CWEs
- Current CWE structure is difficult to understand and use
- Community needs better root cause information for vulnerabilities
- Does CWE naming need a change or update to support easier mapping?
 - Remove CWE names for Views and/or Categories?
 - New naming that embeds a structure (e.g., CWE-1234-1)

