

Security Response

Sandworm Windows zero-day vulnerability being actively exploited in targeted attacks

Critical new Windows zero-day has reportedly been used in a limited number of targeted cyberespionage attacks to deliver a back door on to the victim's computer.

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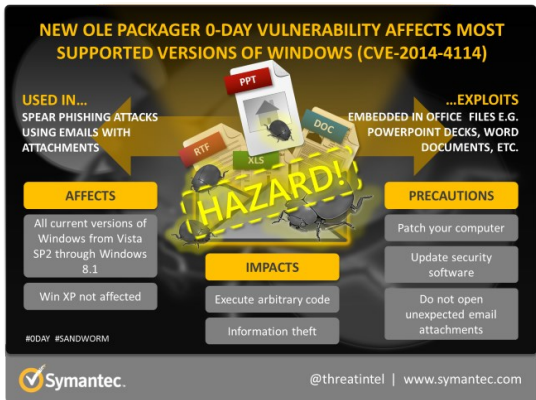
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A critical new vulnerability in the Windows operating system is reportedly being exploited in a limited number of attacks against targets in the US and Europe. The Microsoft Windows OLE Package Manager Remote Code Execution Vulnerability (CVE-2014-4114) allows attackers to embed Object Linking and Embedding (OLE) files from external locations. The vulnerability can be exploited to download and install malware on to the target's computer. The vulnerability appears to have been used by a cyberespionage group known as Sandworm to deliver Backdoor.Lancafd0.A (also known as the Black Energy back door) to targeted organizations.

The vulnerability affects all versions of Windows from Windows Vista Service Pack 2 right up to to Windows 8.1 and Windows Server versions 2008 and 2012. It relates to how Windows handles OLE, a Microsoft technology that allows rich data from one document to be embedded in another or a link to a document to be embedded in another. OLE is generally used for embedding locally stored content, but this vulnerability enables the unprompted download and execution of external files.

Active exploitation underway

The vulnerability was disclosed by ISIGHT Partners, which said that the vulnerability had already been exploited in a small number of cyberespionage attacks against NATO, several unnamed Ukrainian government organizations, a number of Western European governmental organizations, companies operating in the energy sector, European telecoms firms, and a US academic organization. According to our telemetry, attacks using this payload have been underway since August. ISIGHT has attributed these attacks to an advanced persistent threat (APT) group it has named Sandworm.

Attacks to date have seen targeted individuals receive a spear-phishing email containing a malicious PowerPoint file attachment, which is detected by Symantec as Trojan.Mdropper. The PowerPoint file contains two embedded OLE documents containing URLs. If the targeted user opens the PowerPoint file, these URLs are contacted and two files are downloaded, one .exe and one .inf, which will install malware on the computer. Symantec detects this malware payload as Backdoor.Lancafd0.A.

Once installed on the target's computer, this back door allows attackers to download and install other malware. The malware may also download updates for itself, including an information-stealing component.

While the current exploits are using PowerPoint files, given the nature of the vulnerability, we may eventually see this exploit crop up in different Office file types such as Word documents or Excel spreadsheets.

Symantec regards this vulnerability as critical, since it allows attackers to remotely run code on the target's computer. While it has been exploited on a limited basis in the wild, other groups are likely to attempt to take advantage of it now that its existence has been publicized.

Advice for businesses and consumers

Symantec advises all affected Windows users to take the following actions.

- Immediately apply security patches once available from Microsoft
- Ensure that your security software is up-to-date
- Exercise caution when opening email attachments, particularly from unknown sources

Symantec protection

Symantec customers are protected against the malware being used in attacks exploiting this vulnerability with the following detections. Symantec customers that use the Symantec.Cloud service are protected from spam messages used to deliver malware.

Antivirus

- Backdoor.Lancafd0
- Backdoor.Lancafd0.A
- Trojan.Mdropper

Intrusion Prevention

- Attack: Malicious File Download

Update – October 15, 2014:

Microsoft has now issued a security bulletin which provides a patch for the vulnerability. Symantec recommends that all users apply the patch published in Microsoft Security Bulletin MS14-060.



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- November 2014 (11)
- October 2014 (12)
- September 2014 (11)
- August 2014 (14)
- July 2014 (13)
- June 2014 (19)
- May 2014 (18)
- April 2014 (20)
- March 2014 (15)
- February 2014 (22)
- January 2014 (17)
- December 2013 (16)
- November 2013 (24)
- October 2013 (20)
- September 2013 (14)
- August 2013 (16)
- July 2013 (34)
- June 2013 (32)
- May 2013 (27)
- April 2013 (23)
- March 2013 (23)
- February 2013 (26)
- January 2013 (22)
- December 2012 (17)
- November 2012 (19)
- October 2012 (14)
- September 2012 (15)
- August 2012 (29)
- July 2012 (26)
- June 2012 (22)
- May 2012 (26)
- April 2012 (16)
- March 2012 (23)
- February 2012 (18)
- January 2012 (17)
- December 2011 (12)
- November 2011 (11)
- October 2011 (20)
- September 2011 (13)
- August 2011 (20)
- July 2011 (19)
- June 2011 (28)
- May 2011 (26)
- April 2011 (18)
- March 2011 (31)
- February 2011 (23)
- January 2011 (19)
- December 2010 (11)
- November 2010 (17)
- October 2010 (24)
- September 2010 (30)
- August 2010 (26)
- July 2010 (32)
- June 2010 (26)
- May 2010 (26)
- April 2010 (32)
- March 2010 (31)
- February 2010 (30)
- January 2010 (26)
- December 2009 (21)
- November 2009 (32)
- October 2009 (38)
- September 2009 (21)
- August 2009 (31)
- July 2009 (36)
- June 2009 (24)
- May 2009 (23)
- April 2009 (35)
- March 2009 (43)
- February 2009 (25)
- January 2009 (29)
- December 2008 (17)
- November 2008 (21)
- October 2008 (22)
- September 2008 (17)
- August 2008 (22)
- July 2008 (8)
- June 2008 (8)
- May 2008 (9)
- April 2008 (18)
- March 2008 (20)
- February 2008 (30)
- January 2008 (29)
- December 2007 (34)
- November 2007 (42)
- October 2007 (45)
- September 2007 (31)
- August 2007 (41)
- July 2007 (35)
- June 2007 (34)
- May 2007 (38)
- April 2007 (41)
- March 2007 (55)
- February 2007 (45)
- January 2007 (43)
- December 2006 (43)
- November 2006 (40)
- October 2006 (30)
- September 2006 (26)
- August 2006 (31)
- July 2006 (33)
- June 2006 (14)
- May 2006 (19)
- April 2006 (1)

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