

Software Bill of Materials: SBoM

Author: Robert Marion

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- [Definition](#)
- [Requirements](#)
- [NTIA Formats](#)
- [Some Useful Open Source Tools](#)
 - [CycloneDX CLI](#)
 - [Dependency Track by OWASP](#)
- [Best Approaches for SBOM Generation: Snyk or Microsoft SBOM](#)
 - [Requirements:](#)
 - [Snyk](#)
 - [Microsoft SBOM Tool](#)
 - [Syft](#)
- [VEX: Vulnerability Exploitability eXchange](#)
- [SBOM \(Tool Agnostic\) PoC](#)
- [Testing Matrix](#)
- [Pipeline Considerations](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Preface:

This Document was prepared in late 2022 to early 2023. SBoM tooling is rapidly changing and this document reflects an accurate assessment at the time it was created.

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SBoM Definitions, Tools and Automation

Definition

- A SBoM documents the composition of a software product, library, or component
 - SBoMs were mandated by Executive Order 14028¹ in response to software supply chain attacks.

- SBoMs allow a consumer to determine whether a component within a library has a known vulnerability
 - Shows the provenance of 3rd party component
 - Contains licensing information, assuring a consumer that the product they obtain does not violate licensing issues
- It must include COTS in addition to FOSS.
- From Executive Order 14028:
 - 4 Enhancing Software Supply Chain Security.
 - (F) monitoring operations and alerts and responding to attempted and actual cyber incidents;
 - (vii) **providing a purchaser a Software Bill of Materials (SBOM) for each product directly or by publishing it on a public website;**
 - the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, shall publish minimum elements for an SBOM (see below)

Sec 10. Definitions (j) *the term “Software Bill of Materials” or “SBOM” means a formal record containing the details and supply chain relationships of various components used in building software. Software developers and vendors often create products by assembling existing open source and commercial software components. The SBOM enumerates these components in a product. It is analogous to a list of ingredients on food packaging. An SBOM is useful to those who develop or manufacture software, those who select or purchase software, and those who operate software. Developers often use available open source and third-party software components to create a product; an SBOM allows the builder to make sure those components are up to date and to respond quickly to new vulnerabilities. Buyers can use an SBOM to perform vulnerability or license analysis, both of which can be used to evaluate risk in a product. Those who operate software can use SBOMs to quickly and easily determine whether they are at potential risk of a newly discovered vulnerability. A widely used, machine-readable SBOM format allows for greater benefits through automation and tool integration. The SBOMs gain greater value when collectively stored in a repository that can be easily queried by other applications and systems. Understanding the supply chain of software, obtaining an SBOM, and using it to analyze known vulnerabilities are crucial in managing risk.¹*

Requirements

- Who can request an SBoM?
 - All purchasers. EO 14028 Sec 4. e. vii
- An SBoM should reflect the current state of a piece of software.³

NTIA Formats

NTIA identifies three formats in widespread use^{3,9}

- **SPDX:** Originally used for licensing but has grown in scope.
- **CycloneDX:** [a lightweight SBOM standard that originated with OWASP](#)
- **SWID:** primarily used by commercial software publishers. Not relevant to this analysis.

The two competing formats (SPDX and CycloneDX) are likely to stay. Of the SBOM tools tested, Syft produces both formats.

Potential Automation Solutions for Generating SBOMs:

- WhiteSource Renovate: <https://www.whitesourcesoftware.com/sbom-solution/>
 - The WhiteSource sbom generator works by turning a WhiteSource inventory report into SPDX format. This has some disadvantages:
 - assumes everything scanned is inventory
 - assumes that all software materials are scanned with WhiteSource
 - will require some experimentation to catch all language types
- Snyk
 - Snyk has SBOM functionality in beta.
 - Snyk does a very good job at identifying 3rd party dependencies.
 - Because it does a poor job at 1st party dependencies, this solves the problem of differentiating between 1st and 3rd party deps
 - Results currently exported in CycloneDX but will also be exported to SPDX format.
 - Does not currently handle C/C++ or Docker images (yet).
 - Does not (yet) allow for excluding directories or particular files.
- Microsoft: <https://devblogs.microsoft.com/engineering-at-microsoft/generating-software-bills-of-materials-sboms-with-spdx-at-microsoft/>
 - Microsoft has an *open-source* tool that should be platform agnostic
 - sbom-tool is able to generate an sbom for C/C++ projects if it is using Cmake
 - will do a build, when possible, and catches more transitive dependencies
 - Can scan Docker images (not tested)
 - It does not lock a user into a particular product, such as Snyk or WhiteSource/Mend. If you drop a vendor, you still have a solution.
 - It only outputs in SPDX format (no CycloneDX support)
 - It is a very new tool and has some bugs (ex: in version 0.3.0 the generator fails in Windows but works in Linux)
 - For more info, see: <https://github.com/microsoft/sbom-tool> and Here's a neat intro video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRZUZG9vg7k>
 - But:
 - In-house initial testing looks good but a deeper PoC will determine if it is a suitable candidate.
- Syft <https://github.com/anchore/syft>
 - Recommendation appears in <https://mergebase.com/blog/best-tools-for-generating-sbom/>
 - Initial testing produces a usable SBOM
 - Does **not** do a build and does not catch transitive dependencies.
 - Can output in SPDX or CycloneDX
 - Open source project by Anchore. Paid support exists.
- Rezilion <https://www.rezilion.com/>
 - This is a commercial product. Will not evaluate.

SBOM Generation Tool Comparison

Tool	Version	Format(s)	C++	Docker	Issues
Microsoft	0.3.1	SPDX 2.2	Cmake	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">SPDX format is not as useful as CycloneDX because the converters do not have purls
Snyk	Beta	CycloneDX	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Must maintain contract to continue using this.Creates one SBOM per component, which means a single repo could have hundreds of SBOMs. Apply CycloneDX CLI merge to combine SBOMS for a product.
Syft	0.64.0	CycloneDX SPDX	Conan	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No REST API but uses an optional yaml fileUse of Conan is not as widespread as cmake.

Some Useful Open Source Tools

CycloneDX CLI

[CycloneDX CLI](#) is a very useful (possibly necessary) set of utilities that: **converts** SPDX to CycloneDX format, **merges** two or more SBOMs, **validate** a BOM, etc. *This tool is still in development and testing has shown that it has some bugs.*

- Tested: version 0.24.2 (Oct 12, 2022)
- Convert** example from SPDXJSON to CycloneDX JSON format:
 - cyclonedx-win-x64.exe convert --input-file sample.spdx.json --input-format spdxjson --output-format json --output-file output.json
- Merge** is needed to combine two or more BOMs. If SBOMs are generated by Snyk, for example, a single repository will create an SBOM for each project. This is undesirable because an SBOM needs to express the contents of a product.
 - Ex: cyclonedx-win-x64.exe merge --input-files sbom1.json sbom2.json --output-file sbom_all.json

⚠️Caveat: CycloneDX CLI (v 0.24.2)) will fail to convert or validate a BOM generated by the Microsoft sbom-tool (as of version 0.3.1). The hack to

fix this is to replace "PACKAGE-MANAGER" in the "externalRefs" section with "PACKAGE_MANAGER" (i.e., replace the dash with an

underscore throughout the document). ⚠️

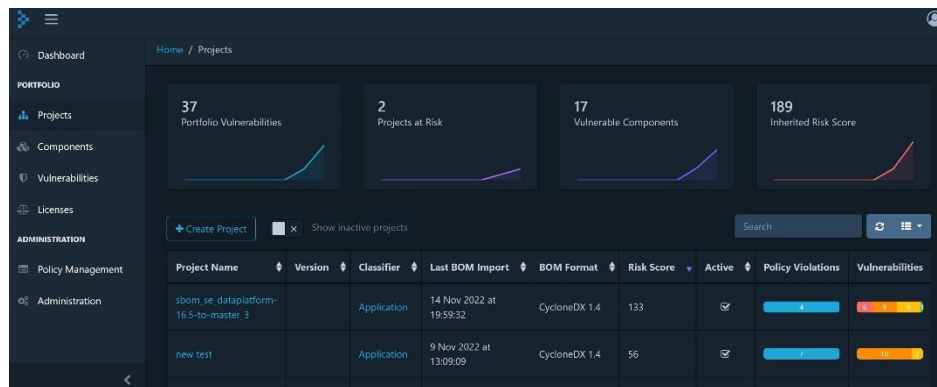
Dependency Track by OWASP

[Dependency Track by OWASP](#) for consumption of an SBOM.

Dependency Track lets you upload SBOMs in CycloneDX format. It will display the components, licenses and even look up vulnerabilities based on their PURL (project urls).

- The one tool to rule them all is [Dependency Track by OWASP](#).
- Initial testing of Dependency Track looks very good.
- It's API first design should make it a great candidate for CI pipeline integration or any other automation.
- Dependency Track runs as a Docker image.
- It includes VEX capability (not yet tested)
- And It is free, open source!

The only drawback to this tool is that it only works with CycloneDX format and so a conversion tool is required if you want to examine/consume something in SPDX format. Converting, given current tools available, will leave out PURLs. In these cases, vulnerability information will not be displayed.



Dependency Track

Best Approaches for SBOM Generation: Snyk or Microsoft SBOM

Requirements:

- Must work in the CI pipeline and be easily automated.
- SBOM generation should be triggered as part of a Jenkins release build.
- It should also be runnable as a stand-alone script from anywhere.
- Must be in either SPDX or CycloneDX format and preferably can generate both.

Snyk

Beta is limited so far. It has been tested and works reasonably well given limitations.

Automation should be easy.

Limitations:

- Will not work for C/C++ projects (currently), which should be monitored by WhiteSource.
- By not running an Open Source solution, you risk losing this functionality if you drop Snyk as a vendor
- Does not currently work for container scanning
- Only produces CycloneDX (not much of a problem)

Microsoft SBOM Tool

- As an open source tool, this removes a vendor requirement.
- Will analyze cmake files for C/C++ code.
- Only produces SPDX. The OWASP CycloneDX CLI converted SBOMs are correct but converted SBOMs do not yield vulnerability information when imported into Dependency Track.
- Automation for the CI pipeline appears to be something that can be reasonably achieved.

Syft

- As an open source tool, this removes a vendor requirement
- Output can be configured to be SPDX or CycloneDX
- Has no API but uses a configurable yaml file
- Allows for exclusions of directories and files
- Will analyze Conan for C/C++
- TODO more testing. Determine if it misses any of the package-managed source and test C++

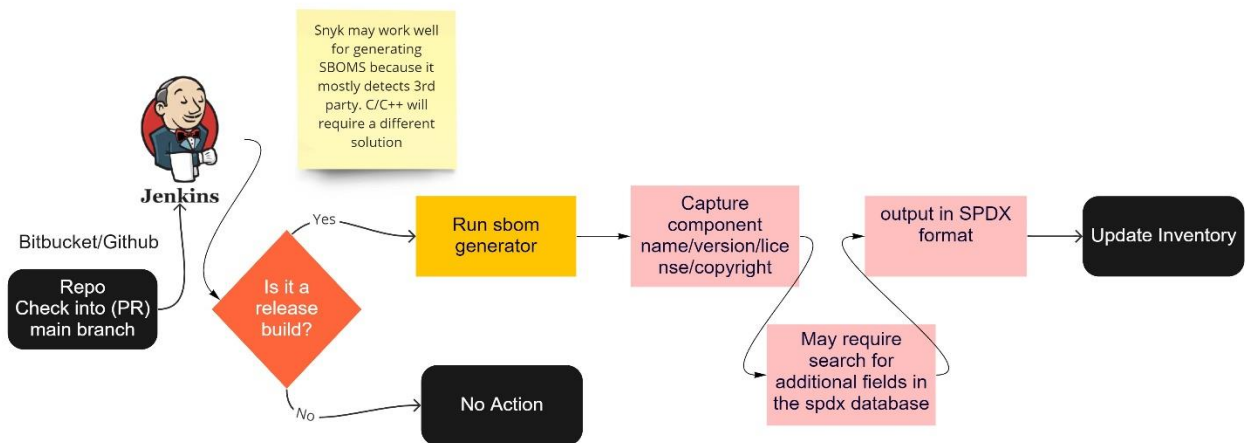
VEX: Vulnerability Exploitability eXchange

The goal [of a VEX] is to communicate the exploitability of components with known vulnerabilities in the context of the product in which they are used.¹¹

SBOMs are relatively static but the vulnerabilities in the components of an SBOM will be very dynamic, a VEX:

- Should, be a separate document from an SBOM (it is inadvisable to create one, integrated document).
- Integrating an SBOM with its VEX BOM is vendor and format dependent.
- As mentioned above, [Dependency Track by OWASP](#) may be a good solution to the problem.

SBOM (Tool Agnostic) PoC



Testing Matrix

Microsoft SBOM tool: SBOM Generation

Steps:

1. Select repos for testing
2. Generate SBOMS using: sbom-tool-win-x64.exe generate ...
 1. Ex: >sbom-tool-win-x64.exe generate -b ./outputdir -bc C:/SBOM/test_data/cis-etl -pn MyTest -pv 1.0 -nsb https://www.somepath.com -ps SomeName
3. Convert from SPDXJSON format to CycloneDX JSON format.
 1. Do this using the CycloneDX CLI tool with the "convert option"
 2. Ex: cyclonedx-win-x64.exe convert --input-file sample.spdx.json --input-format spdxjson --output-format json --output-file output.json
4. Make the CycloneDX human readable by scanning it with Dependency Track (discussed above).
5. Verify results for accuracy and completeness. Include testing for C/C++ and container files and note results.

	Input repo(s)	Repo size/file count	Composition	Components discovered	Errors: components not found	C++/Docker [TODO]	Issues/Notes
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Snyk	CAS: cis-etf	20.9 MB/3,015 files	Maven/Java/Python	1393	TODO		Pending verification
Microsoft	CAS: cis-etf	TODO					
Syft	CAS: cis-etf			689			
Snyk	adc- contrib						
Microsoft	adc- contrib						
Syft	adc- contrib	105					Did not find C/C++ because there were no Conan files

Pipeline Considerations

Regardless of which technology or method you use to build the SBOM, very likely triggering will be defined from a pipeline.yaml.

Ex:

```
sbom:
  enable: true

  branch: master

  exclusions: {list of dirs}
```

Conclusion

All the tools that have been tested are somewhat new and each has their advantages and disadvantages. As time goes by, these should all get better. However, the most promising solutions would use either Snyk, Syft or the Microsoft SBOM tool for generating SBOMS. Consumption/viewing can be done with OWASP Dependency Track. That tool would be better if it could accept SPDX format in addition to CycloneDX.

C/C++ remains an issue. Some coverage is possible with the Microsoft tool if the code has cmake files and coverage is possible with Syft if the Conan package manager is being used. The Snyk tool, at present does not handle C/C++ but work is being done on that.

✔ Syft almost does everything needed. It may omit transient dependencies, which might actually be acceptable. C/C++ scanning omits cmake. A hybrid approach where C/C++ is scanned with the Microsoft tool and everything else is scanned with Syft and the two SBOMs are combined using the CycloneDX **merge** function may be a very good way to build an SBOM that meets customer requirements.

Or

✔ The Microsoft SBOM tool will build, catch transitive dependencies, and use cmake to catch more C/C++ than Conan. It is locked into SPDX format, which is perfectly acceptable as it meets requirements. Unfortunately, reading files in Dependency Track will require converting to CycloneDX with either the Syft or CycloneDX CLI tool but it impedes using Dependency Track's vulnerability discovery since the conversion does not create PURLs for components.

References

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