

Operational Security Capabilities for  
IP Network Infrastructure (opsec)  
Internet-Draft  
Intended status: BCP  
Expires: June 19, 2012

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Recommendations on filtering of IP packets containing IP options  
draft-gont-opsec-ip-options-filtering-02.txt

## Abstract

This document provides advice on the filtering of packets based on the IP options they contain. Additionally, it discusses the operational and interoperability implications of such filtering.

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction . . . . .	5
2. IP Options . . . . .	5
3. General security implications of IP options . . . . .	6
3.1. Processing requirements . . . . .	7
4. Advice on handling of specific IP Options . . . . .	7
4.1. End of Option List (Type = 0) . . . . .	7
4.1.1. Uses . . . . .	7
4.1.2. Option specification . . . . .	7
4.1.3. Threats . . . . .	7
4.1.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	7
4.1.5. Advice . . . . .	7
4.2. No Operation (Type = 1) . . . . .	7
4.2.1. Uses . . . . .	8
4.2.2. Option specification . . . . .	8
4.2.3. Threats . . . . .	8
4.2.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	8
4.2.5. Advice . . . . .	8
4.3. Loose Source and Record Route (LSRR) (Type = 131) . . . . .	8
4.3.1. Uses . . . . .	8
4.3.2. Option specification . . . . .	8
4.3.3. Threats . . . . .	9
4.3.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	9
4.3.5. Advice . . . . .	9
4.4. Strict Source and Record Route (SSRR) (Type = 137) . . . . .	9
4.4.1. Uses . . . . .	9
4.4.2. Option specification . . . . .	10
4.4.3. Threats . . . . .	10
4.4.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	10
4.4.5. Advice . . . . .	10
4.5. Record Route (Type = 7) . . . . .	10
4.5.1. Uses . . . . .	10
4.5.2. Option specification . . . . .	10
4.5.3. Threats . . . . .	10
4.5.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	11
4.5.5. Advice . . . . .	11
4.6. Stream Identifier (Type = 136) . . . . .	11
4.6.1. Uses . . . . .	11
4.6.2. Option specification . . . . .	11
4.6.3. Threats . . . . .	11
4.6.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	11
4.6.5. Advice . . . . .	12
4.7. Internet Timestamp (Type = 68) . . . . .	12
4.7.1. Uses . . . . .	12
4.7.2. Option specification . . . . .	12
4.7.3. Threats . . . . .	12
4.7.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	12

4.7.5.	Advice . . . . .	12
4.8.	Router Alert (Type = 148) . . . . .	13
4.8.1.	Uses . . . . .	13
4.8.2.	Option specification . . . . .	13
4.8.3.	Threats . . . . .	13
4.8.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	13
4.8.5.	Advice . . . . .	13
4.9.	Probe MTU (Type = 11) (obsolete) . . . . .	13
4.9.1.	Uses . . . . .	13
4.9.2.	Option specification . . . . .	13
4.9.3.	Threats . . . . .	14
4.9.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	14
4.9.5.	Advice . . . . .	14
4.10.	Reply MTU (Type = 12) (obsolete) . . . . .	14
4.10.1.	Uses . . . . .	14
4.10.2.	Option specification . . . . .	14
4.10.3.	Threats . . . . .	14
4.10.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	14
4.10.5.	Advice . . . . .	14
4.11.	Traceroute (Type = 82) . . . . .	14
4.11.1.	Uses . . . . .	14
4.11.2.	Option specification . . . . .	14
4.11.3.	Threats . . . . .	15
4.11.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	15
4.11.5.	Advice . . . . .	15
4.12.	DoD Basic Security Option (Type = 130) . . . . .	15
4.12.1.	Uses . . . . .	15
4.12.2.	Option specification . . . . .	15
4.12.3.	Threats . . . . .	16
4.12.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	16
4.12.5.	Advice . . . . .	16
4.13.	DoD Extended Security Option (Type = 133) . . . . .	16
4.13.1.	Uses . . . . .	17
4.13.2.	Option specification . . . . .	17
4.13.3.	Threats . . . . .	17
4.13.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	17
4.13.5.	Advice . . . . .	17
4.14.	Commercial IP Security Option (CIPSO) (Type = 134) . . . . .	18
4.14.1.	Uses . . . . .	18
4.14.2.	Option specification . . . . .	18
4.14.3.	Threats . . . . .	18
4.14.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	18
4.14.5.	Advice . . . . .	18
4.15.	Sender Directed Multi-Destination Delivery (Type = 149) . . . . .	19
4.15.1.	Uses . . . . .	19
4.15.2.	Option specification . . . . .	19
4.15.3.	Threats . . . . .	19
4.15.4.	Operational/interoperability impact if blocked . . . . .	19

4.15.5. Advice . . . . .	19
5. Security Considerations . . . . .	19
6. Acknowledgements . . . . .	19
7. Contributors . . . . .	20
8. References . . . . .	20
8.1. Normative References . . . . .	20
8.2. Informative References . . . . .	21
Appendix A. Changes from previous versions of the draft (to be removed by the RFC Editor before publishing this document as an RFC) . . . . .	26
A.1. Changes introduced in draft-gont-opsec-ip-options-filtering-01 . . . . .	26
Authors' Addresses . . . . .	27

## 1. Introduction

Various protocols may use IP Options to some extent, therefore the filtering of such options may have implications on proper functioning of the protocol. As such, this document attempts to discuss the operational and interoperability implications of such filtering. Additionally, this document will outline what a network operator might do in a typical enterprise or Service Provider environment.

We note that data seems to indicate that there is a current widespread practice of blocking IPv4 optioned packets. There are various plausible approaches to minimize the potential negative effects of IPv4 optioned packets while allowing some options semantics. One approach is to allow for specific options that are expected or needed, and a default deny. A different approach is to deny unneeded options and a default allow. Yet a third option is to allow for end-to-end semantics by ignoring options and treating packets as un-optioned while in transit. The current state tends to support the first or third approaches as more realistic. Some results of regarding the current state of affairs with respect to filtering of packets containing IP options can be found in [MEDINA].

We also note that while this document provides advice on a "per IP option type", not all devices may provide functionality to filter IP packets on a "per IP option type". Additionally, even in cases in which such functionality is provided, the operator might want to specify a filtering policy with a coarser granularity (rather than on a "per IP option type" granularity), as indicated above.

Finally, in scenarios in which processing of IP options by intermediate systems is not required, a widespread approach is to simply ignore IP options, and process the corresponding packets as if they do not contain any IP options.

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

## 2. IP Options

IP options allow for the extension of the Internet Protocol

There are two cases for the format of an option:

- o Case 1: A single byte of option-type.

- o Case 2: An option-type byte, an option-length byte, and the actual option-data bytes.

In the Case 2, the option-length byte counts the option-type byte and the option-length byte, as well as the actual option-data bytes.

All current and future options except "End of Option List" (Type = 0) and "No Operation" (Type = 1), are of Class 2.

The option-type has three fields:

- o 1 bit: copied flag.
- o 2 bits: option class.
- o 5 bits: option number.

The copied flag indicates whether this option should be copied to all fragments in the event the packet carrying it needs to be fragmented:

- o 0 = not copied.
- o 1 = copied.

The values for the option class are:

- o 0 = control.
- o 1 = reserved for future use.
- o 2 = debugging and measurement.
- o 3 = reserved for future use.

This format allows for the creation of new options for the extension of the Internet Protocol (IP).

Finally, the option number identifies the syntax of the rest of the option.

[IANA2006b] contains the list of the currently assigned IP option numbers.

### 3. General security implications of IP options

### 3.1. Processing requirements

Router manufacturers tend to do IP option processing in a slower path. Unless special care is taken, this represents Denial of Service (DoS) risk, as there is potential for overwhelming the router with option processing.

The following sections contain a description of each of the IP options that have so far been specified, a discussion of possible interoperability implications if packets containing such options are filtered, and specific advice on whether to filter packets containing these options in a typical enterprise or Service Provider environment.

## 4. Advice on handling of specific IP Options

### 4.1. End of Option List (Type = 0)

#### 4.1.1. Uses

This option is used to indicate the "end of options" in those cases in which the end of options would not coincide with the end of the Internet Protocol Header.

#### 4.1.2. Option specification

Specified in RFC 791 [RFC0791].

#### 4.1.3. Threats

No security issues are known for this option, other than the general security implications of IP options discussed in Section 3.

#### 4.1.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

Packets containing any IP options are likely to include an End of Option List. Therefore, if packets containing this option are filtered, it is very likely that legitimate traffic is filtered.

#### 4.1.5. Advice

Do not filter packets containing this option.

### 4.2. No Operation (Type = 1)

#### 4.2.1. Uses

The no-operation option is basically meant to allow the sending system to align subsequent options in, for example, 32-bit boundaries.

#### 4.2.2. Option specification

Specified in RFC 791 [RFC0791].

#### 4.2.3. Threats

No security issues are known for this option, other than the general security implications of IP options discussed in Section 3.

#### 4.2.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

#### 4.2.5. Advice

Do not filter packets containing this option.

### 4.3. Loose Source and Record Route (LSRR) (Type = 131)

RFC 791 states that this option should appear, at most, once in a given packet. Thus, if a packet contains more than one LSRR option, it should be dropped, and this event should be logged (e.g., a counter could be incremented to reflect the packet drop). Additionally, packets containing a combination of LSRR and SSRR options should be dropped, and this event should be logged (e.g., a counter could be incremented to reflect the packet drop).

#### 4.3.1. Uses

This option lets the originating system specify a number of intermediate systems a packet must pass through to get to the destination host. Additionally, the route followed by the packet is recorded in the option. The receiving host (end-system) must use the reverse of the path contained in the received LSRR option.

The LSRR option can be of help in debugging some network problems. Some ISP (Internet Service Provider) peering agreements require support for this option in the routers within the peer of the ISP.

#### 4.3.2. Option specification

Specified in RFC 791 [RFC0791].



#### 4.3.3. Threats

The LSRR option has well-known security implications. Among other things, the option can be used to:

- o Bypass firewall rules
- o Reach otherwise unreachable internet systems
- o Establish TCP connections in a stealthy way
- o Learn about the topology of a network
- o Perform bandwidth-exhaustion attacks

Of these attack vectors, the one that has probably received least attention is the use of the LSRR option to perform bandwidth exhaustion attacks. The LSRR option can be used as an amplification method for performing bandwidth-exhaustion attacks, as an attacker could make a packet bounce multiple times between a number of systems by carefully crafting an LSRR option.

This is the IPv4-version of the IPv6 amplification attack that was widely publicized in 2007 [Biondi2007]. The only difference is that the maximum length of the IPv4 header (and hence the LSRR option) limits the amplification factor when compared to the IPv6 counter-part.

#### 4.3.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

Network troubleshooting techniques that may employ the LSRR option (such as ping or traceroute) would break. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is virtually impossible to use such techniques due to widespread filtering of the LSRR option.

#### 4.3.5. Advice

All systems should, by default, drop IP packets that contain an LSRR option.

### 4.4. Strict Source and Record Route (SSRR) (Type = 137)

#### 4.4.1. Uses

This option allows the originating system to specify a number of intermediate systems a packet must pass through to get to the destination host. Additionally, the route followed by the packet is recorded in the option, and the destination host (end-system) must

use the reverse of the path contained in the received SSRR option.

This option is similar to the Loose Source and Record Route (LSRR) option, with the only difference that in the case of SSRR, the route specified in the option is the exact route the packet must take (i.e., no other intervening routers are allowed to be in the route).

The SSSR option can be of help in debugging some network problems. Some ISP (Internet Service Provider) peering agreements require support for this option in the routers within the peer of the ISP.

#### 4.4.2. Option specification

Specified in RFC 791 [RFC0791].

#### 4.4.3. Threats

The SSRR option has the same security implications as the LSRR option. Please refer to Section 4.3 for a discussion of such security implications.

#### 4.4.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

Network troubleshooting techniques that may employ the SSRR option (such as ping or traceroute) would break. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is virtually impossible to use such techniques due to widespread filtering of the SSRR option.

#### 4.4.5. Advice

All systems should, by default, drop IP packets that contain an SSRR option.

### 4.5. Record Route (Type = 7)

#### 4.5.1. Uses

This option provides a means to record the route that a given packet follows.

#### 4.5.2. Option specification

Specified in RFC 791 [RFC0791].

#### 4.5.3. Threats

This option can be exploited to map the topology of a network. However, the limited space in the IP header limits the usefulness of

this option for that purpose.

#### 4.5.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

Network troubleshooting techniques that may employ the RR option (such as ping with the RR option) would break. Nevertheless, it should be noted that it is virtually impossible to use such techniques due to widespread filtering of the RR option.

#### 4.5.5. Advice

Drop IP packets that contain a Record Route option.

#### 4.6. Stream Identifier (Type = 136)

The Stream Identifier option originally provided a means for the 16-bit SATNET stream Identifier to be carried through networks that did not support the stream concept.

However, as stated by Section 4.2.2.1 of RFC 1812 [RFC1812], this option is obsolete. Therefore, it must be ignored by the processing systems.

In the case of legacy systems still using this option, the length field of the option should be checked to be 4. If the option does not pass this check, it should be dropped, and this event should be logged (e.g., a counter could be incremented to reflect the packet drop).

RFC 791 states that this option appears at most once in a given datagram. Therefore, if a packet contains more than one instance of this option, it should be dropped, and this event should be logged (e.g., a counter could be incremented to reflect the packet drop).

##### 4.6.1. Uses

##### 4.6.2. Option specification

Specified in RFC 791 [RFC0791].

##### 4.6.3. Threats

TBD

##### 4.6.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

None.

#### 4.6.5. Advice

Filter IP packets that contain a Stream Identifier option.

#### 4.7. Internet Timestamp (Type = 68)

##### 4.7.1. Uses

This option provides a means for recording the time at which each system processed this datagram.

##### 4.7.2. Option specification

Specified by RFC 791 [RFC0791].

##### 4.7.3. Threats

The timestamp option has a number of security implications. Among them are:

- o It allows an attacker to obtain the current time of the systems that process the packet, which the attacker may find useful in a number of scenarios.
- o It may be used to map the network topology, in a similar way to the IP Record Route option.
- o It may be used to fingerprint the operating system in use by a system processing the datagram.
- o It may be used to fingerprint physical devices, by analyzing the clock skew.

[Kohno2005] describes a technique for fingerprinting devices by measuring the clock skew. It exploits, among other things, the timestamps that can be obtained by means of the ICMP timestamp request messages [RFC0791]. However, the same fingerprinting method could be implemented with the aid of the Internet Timestamp option.

##### 4.7.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

No security issues are known for this option, other than the general security implications of IP options discussed in Section 3.

##### 4.7.5. Advice

Filter IP packets that contain an Internet Timestamp option.

#### 4.8. Router Alert (Type = 148)

##### 4.8.1. Uses

The Router Alert option has the semantic "routers should examine this packet more closely, if they participate in the functionality denoted by the Value of the option".

##### 4.8.2. Option specification

The Router Alert option is defined in RFC 2113 [RFC2113] and later updates to it have been clarified by RFC 5350 [RFC5350]. It contains a 16-bit Value governed by an IANA registry (see [RFC5350]).

##### 4.8.3. Threats

The security implications of the Router Alert option have been discussed in detail in [I-D.ietf-intarea-router-alert-considerations]. Basically, the Router Alert option might be exploited to perform a Denial of Service (DoS) attack by exhausting CPU resources at the processing routers.

##### 4.8.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

Applications that employ the Router Alert option (such as RSVP [RFC2205]) would break.

##### 4.8.5. Advice

This option should be allowed only on controlled environments, where the option can be used safely ([I-D.ietf-intarea-router-alert-considerations] identifies such environments). In other environments, packets containing this option should be dropped.

#### 4.9. Probe MTU (Type = 11) (obsolete)

##### 4.9.1. Uses

This option originally provided a mechanism to discover the Path-MTU. It has been declared obsolete.

##### 4.9.2. Option specification

This option was defined in RFC 1063 [RFC1063]. This option is obsolete.

#### 4.9.3. Threats

None

#### 4.9.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

None

#### 4.9.5. Advice

Filter IP packets that contain a Probe MTU option.

### 4.10. Reply MTU (Type = 12) (obsolete)

#### 4.10.1. Uses

This option and originally provided a mechanism to discover the Path-MTU. It is now obsolete.

#### 4.10.2. Option specification

This option was originally specified by RFC 1063 [RFC1063], and is now obsolete.

#### 4.10.3. Threats

None.

#### 4.10.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

None

#### 4.10.5. Advice

Filter IP packets that contain a Reply MTU option.

### 4.11. Traceroute (Type = 82)

#### 4.11.1. Uses

This option originally provided a mechanism to trace the path to a host.

#### 4.11.2. Option specification

This option was originally specified by RFC 1393 [RFC1393]. It has been declared obsolete.

#### 4.11.3. Threats

None

#### 4.11.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

None

#### 4.11.5. Advice

Filter IP packets that contain a Traceroute option.

### 4.12. DoD Basic Security Option (Type = 130)

#### 4.12.1. Uses

This option is used by Multi-Level-Secure (MLS) end-systems and intermediate systems in specific environments to [RFC1108]:

- o Transmit from source to destination in a network standard representation the common security labels required by computer security models [Landwehr81],
- o Validate the datagram as appropriate for transmission from the source and delivery to the destination, and,
- o Ensure that the route taken by the datagram is protected to the level required by all protection authorities indicated on the datagram.

The DoD Basic Security Option (BSO) is currently implemented in a number of operating systems (e.g., [IRIX2008], [SELinux2008], [Solaris2008], and [Cisco2008]), and deployed in a number of high-security networks. These networks are typically either in physically secure locations, protected by military/governmental communications security equipment, or both. Such networks are typically built using commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) IP routers and Ethernet switches, but are not normally interconnected with the global public Internet. This option probably has more deployment now than when the IESG removed this option from the IETF standards-track. [RFC5570] describes a similar option recently defined for IPv6 and has much more detailed explanations of how sensitivity label options are used in real-world deployments.

#### 4.12.2. Option specification

It is specified by RFC 1108 [RFC1108] (which obsoletes RFC 1038 [RFC1038]).

RFC 791 [RFC0791] defined the "Security Option" (Type = 130), which used the same option type as the DoD Basic Security option discussed in this section. The "Security Option" specified in RFC 791 is considered obsolete by Section 3.2.1.8 of RFC 1122, and therefore the discussion in this section is focused on the DoD Basic Security option specified by RFC 1108 [RFC1108].

Section 4.2.2.1 of RFC 1812 states that routers "SHOULD implement this option".

[IOS-12.2][RFC4949][RFC3585][RFC4807]

#### 4.12.3. Threats

Presence of this option in a packet does not by itself create any specific new threat (other than the usual generic issues that might be created if packets with options are forwarded via the "slow path"). Packets with this option ought not normally be seen on the global public Internet.

#### 4.12.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

If packets with this option are blocked or if the option is stripped from the packet during transmission from source to destination, then the packet itself is likely to be dropped by the receiver because it isn't properly labelled. In some cases, the receiver might receive the packet but associate an incorrect sensitivity label with the received data from the packet whose BSO was stripped by an intermediate router or firewall. Associating an incorrect sensitivity label can cause the received information either to be handled as more sensitive than it really is ("upgrading") or as less sensitive than it really is ("downgrading"), either of which is problematic.

#### 4.12.5. Advice

Routers and firewalls ought not by default drop packets containing IPSO and also ought not by default strip the IPSO from the packet. For auditing reasons, routers and firewalls SHOULD be capable of logging the numbers of packets containing the BSO on a per-interface basis. Also, routers and firewalls SHOULD be capable of filtering packets based on the BSO presence as well as the BSO values.

#### 4.13. DoD Extended Security Option (Type = 133)



#### 4.13.1. Uses

This option permits additional security labeling information, beyond that present in the Basic Security Option (Section 4.12), to be supplied in an IP datagram to meet the needs of registered authorities.

#### 4.13.2. Option specification

The DoD Extended Security Option (ESO) is specified by RFC 1108 [RFC1108].

[IOS-12.2][RFC4949][RFC3585][RFC4807]

#### 4.13.3. Threats

Presence of this option in a packet does not by itself create any specific new threat (other than the usual generic issues that might be created if packets with options are forwarded via the "slow path"). Packets with this option ought not normally be seen on the global public Internet

#### 4.13.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

If packets with this option are blocked or if the option is stripped from the packet during transmission from source to destination, then the packet itself is likely to be dropped by the receiver because it isn't properly labelled. In some cases, the receiver might receive the packet but associate an incorrect sensitivity label with the received data from the packet whose ESO was stripped by an intermediate router or firewall. Associating an incorrect sensitivity label can cause the received information either to be handled as more sensitive than it really is ("upgrading") or as less sensitive than it really is ("downgrading"), either of which is problematic.

#### 4.13.5. Advice

Routers and firewalls ought not by default drop packets containing an ESO and also ought not by default strip the ESO from the packet. For auditing reasons, routers and firewalls SHOULD be capable of logging the numbers of packets containing the ESO on a per-interface basis. Also, routers and firewalls SHOULD be capable of filtering packets based on the ESO presence as well as the ESO values.

#### 4.14. Commercial IP Security Option (CIPSO) (Type = 134)

##### 4.14.1. Uses

This option was proposed by the Trusted Systems Interoperability Group (TSIG), with the intent of meeting trusted networking requirements for the commercial trusted systems market place.

It is currently implemented in a number of operating systems (e.g., IRIX [IRIX2008], Security-Enhanced Linux [SELinux2008], and Solaris [Solaris2008]), and deployed in a number of high-security networks.

##### 4.14.2. Option specification

This option is specified in [CIPSO1992] and [FIPS1994]. There are zero known IP router implementations of CIPSO. Several MLS operating systems support CIPSO, generally the same MLS operating systems that support IPSO.

##### 4.14.3. Threats

Presence of this option in a packet does not by itself create any specific new threat (other than the usual generic issues that might be created if packets with options are forwarded via the "slow path"). Packets with this option ought not normally be seen on the global public Internet.

##### 4.14.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

If packets with this option are blocked or if the option is stripped from the packet during transmission from source to destination, then the packet itself is likely to be dropped by the receiver because it isn't properly labelled. In some cases, the receiver might receive the packet but associate an incorrect sensitivity label with the received data from the packet whose CIPSO was stripped by an intermediate router or firewall. Associating an incorrect sensitivity label can cause the received information either to be handled as more sensitive than it really is ("upgrading") or as less sensitive than it really is ("downgrading"), either of which is problematic.

##### 4.14.5. Advice

Because of the design of this option, with variable syntax and variable length, it is not practical to support specialized filtering using the CIPSO information. No routers or firewalls are known to support this option. However, by default a router or firewall should not modify or remove this option from IP packets and a router or

firewall should not by default drop packets containing this option.

#### 4.15. Sender Directed Multi-Destination Delivery (Type = 149)

##### 4.15.1. Uses

This option originally provided unreliable UDP delivery to a set of addresses included in the option. It is currently obsolete.

##### 4.15.2. Option specification

This option is defined in RFC 1770 [RFC1770].

##### 4.15.3. Threats

This option could have been exploited for bandwidth-amplification in Denial of Service (DoS) attacks.

##### 4.15.4. Operational/interoperability impact if blocked

None.

##### 4.15.5. Advice

Filter IP packets that contain a Sender Directed Multi-Destination Delivery option.

## 5. Security Considerations

This document provides advice on the filtering of IP packets that contain IP options. Filtering of such packets can help to mitigate the security issues that arise from use of different IP options.

## 6. Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Carlos Pignataro and Donald Smith for providing valuable comments on earlier versions of this document.

Part of this document is based on the document &Security Assesment of the Internet Protocol& [CPNI2008] that is the result of a project carried out by Fernando Gont on behalf of UK CPNI (formerly NISCC).

Fernando Gont would like to thank UK CPNI (formerly NISCC) for their continued support.

## 7. Contributors

Carlos Pignataro provided material that was incorporated into this document.

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Appendix A. Changes from previous versions of the draft (to be removed by the RFC Editor before publishing this document as an RFC)

A.1. Changes introduced in draft-gont-opsec-ip-options-filtering-01

- o Populated many sections that had a "TBD" placeholder.
- o Many unused references were pruned from the "References" section.
- o Addresses part of the comments provided by Carlos Pignataro and Donald Smith.

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