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# kernel-sign

*Release 4.0.0*

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**May 21, 2025**



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## KERNEL-SIGN

### 1.1 Overview

Signed kernel modules provide a mechanism for the kernel to verify the integrity of a module. This provides the tools needed to build a kernel with support for signed modules.

- All git tags are signed with [arch@sapience.com](mailto:arch@sapience.com) key which is available via WKD or download from <https://www.sapience.com/tech>.

#### 1.1.1 Latest Changes

- Tidy and Improve code:
  - PEP-8, PEP-257, PEP-484 PEP-561
  - Refactor
- Add tests : run pytest in the *tests* directory.

This will locate and use a kernel provided tool: `/usr/lib/modules/xxx/build/scripts/sign-file`
- key and hash types are now read from the kernel config file. Keeps everything consistent.
- Code re-org with supporting modules now moved to `lib/xxx.py`
- Code works with hash type sha3-xxx (e.g. *sha3-512*) available in kernel 6.7 and openssl 3.2 or later.

### 1.2 Available

Kernel-Sign Github repo:

- [Kernel\\_Sign](#)

These docs on signed kernel modules:

- [Arch Wiki](#)
- [Kernel Docs](#)



## INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Kernel Modules

The Linux kernel distinguishes and keeps separate the verification of modules from requiring or forcing modules to verify before allowing them to be loaded. Kernel modules fall into 2 classes:

Standard “in tree” modules which come with the kernel source code. They are compiled during the normal kernel build.

Out of tree modules which are not part of the kernel source distribution. They are built outside of the kernel tree, requiring the kernel headers package for each kernel they are to be built for. They can be built manually for a specific kernel and packaged, or they can be built whenever needed using DKMS [DKMS](#)

Examples of such packages, provided by Arch, include:

- Virtual guest modules [virtualbox-guest-modules-arch](#)

During a standard kernel compilation, the kernel build tools create a private/public key pair and sign every in tree module (using the private key). The public key is saved in the kernel itself. When a module is subsequently loaded, the public key can then be used to verify that the module is unchanged.

The kernel can be enabled to always verify modules and report any failures to standard logs. The choice to permit the loading and use of a module which could not be verified can be either compiled into kernel or turned on at run time using a kernel parameter as explained in Arch Wiki Kernel Parameters [Arch Wiki Kernel Parameters](#).

### 2.2 How to sign kernel modules using a custom kernel

The starting point is based on building a custom kernel package outlined in Kernel/Arch Build System [Kernel/Arch Build System](#),

We will adjust the build to:

- Sign the standard in tree kernel modules
- Provide what is needed to have signed out of tree modules and for the kernel to verify those modules.

Note: The goal is to have:

- In tree modules signed during the standard kernel build process.

The standard kernel build creates a fresh public/private key pair on each build.

- Out of tree modules are signed and the associated public key is compiled in to the kernel. We will create a separate public/private key pair on each build.

## 2.3 Summary of what needs to be done

Each kernel build needs to be made aware of the key/cert being used. Fresh keys are generated with each new kernel build.

A kernel config parameter is now used to make kernel aware of additional signing key:

```
CONFIG_SYSTEM_TRUSTED_KEYS="/path/to/oot-signing_keys.pem".
```

Keys and signing tools will be stored in current module build directory. Nothing needs to be done to clean this as removal is handled by the standard module cleanup.

Certs are thus installed in

```
/usr/lib/modules/<kernel-vers>-<build>/certs-local.
```



## KERNEL CONFIGURATION

### 3.1 Kernel Config File

CONFIG\_SYSTEM\_TRUSTED\_KEYS will be added automatically as explained below. In addition the following config options should be set by either manually editing the 'config' file, or via make menuconfig in the linux 'src' area and subsequently copying the updated .config file back to the build file config. It is preferable to use elliptic curve type keys and zstd compression.

- CONFIG\_MODULE\_SIG=y  
Enable Loadable module support —>  
Module Signature Verification -> activate
- CONFIG\_MODULE\_SIG\_FORCE=n  
Require modules to be validly signed -> leave off  
  
This allows the decision to enforce verified modules only as boot command line. If you are comfortable all is working then by all means change this to 'y' Command line version of this is : module.sig\_enforce=1
- CONFIG\_MODULE\_SIG\_HASH=sha512  
Automatically sign all modules -> activate Which hash algorithm -> SHA-512  
  
kernel 6.7 and later support sha3 hashes. The preferred hash choice is then sha3-512. This also requires openssl version 3.2 or newer.
- CONFIG\_MODULE\_COMPRESS\_ZSTD=y  
Compress modules on installation -> activate Compression algorithm (ZSTD)
- CONFIG\_MODULE\_SIG\_KEY\_TYPE\_ECDSA=y  
Cryptographic API —> Certificates for Signature Checking —> Type of module signing key to be generated -> ECDSA
- CONFIG\_MODULE\_ALLOW\_MISSING\_NAMESPACE\_IMPORTS=n  
Enable Loadable module support —> Allow loading of modules with missing namespace imports -> set off

### 3.2 Kernel command line

After you are comfortable things are working well you can enable the kernel parameter to require that the kernel only permit verified modules to be loaded:

```
module.sig_enforce=1
```



## TOOLS NEEDED

### 4.1 kernel build package

In the directory where the kernel package is built:

```
mkdir certs-local
```

This directory will provide the tools to create the keys, as well as signing kernel modules.

- Copy these files into certs-local directory:

```
genkeys.py  
install-certs.py  
sign_module.py  
lib/*.py  
x509.oot.genkey
```

### 4.2 genkey.py & x509.oot.genkey

genkey.py along with its configuration file x509.oot.genkey are used to create key pairs. It also provides the kernel with the key to sign out of tree modules by updating the config file used to build the kernel.

genkeys.py will create the key pairs in a directory named by date-time. It defaults to refreshing the keys every 7 days but this can be changed with the *-refresh* command line option.

It also creates a soft link named 'current' which points to the newly created directory with the 'current' keys. The actual key directory is named by date and time.

genkeys will check and update kernel configs given by the *-config* config(s) option. This takes either a single config file, or a shell glob for multiple files. e.g. *-config 'conf/config.\*'*. Remember to quote any wildcard characters to prevent the shell from expanding them.

All configs will be updated with the same key. The default keytype and hash are taken from the kernel config (from CONFIG\_MODULE\_SIG\_HASH and CONFIG\_MODULE\_SIG\_KEY\_TYPE\_XXX)<sup>1</sup>.

If multiple kernel configs are being used, all must use same key and hash types.

### 4.3 sign\_module.py

signs out of tree kernel modules. It can be run manually but is typically invoked by dkms/kernel-sign.sh. It handles modules compressed with zstd, xz and gzip and depends on python-zstandard package to help with those compressed with zstd.

---

<sup>1</sup> In earlier versions these defaulted to elliptic curve and sha512 and could be set from the command line.

## 4.4 install-certs.py

is called from the `package_headers()` function of `PKGBUILD` to install the signing keys. Example is given below.

These files are all provided.

## 4.5 dkms support

### Important

DKMS a mechanism for out-of-tree modules to be compiled against the kernel headers. It is one thing to use signed modules provided in the kernel source but it is quite another to use modules, signed or not, that are out-of-tree. Any such module will *taint* the kernel. See kernel docs [tainted\\_kernel](#) for more information.

```
mkdir certs-local/dkms
```

and add 2 files to the dkms dir:

```
kernel-sign.conf  
kernel-sign.sh
```

These will be installed in `/etc/dkms` and provide a mechanism for dkms to automatically sign modules using the local key discussed above - this is the recommended way to sign kernel modules. As explained, below - once this is installed - all that is needed to have dkms automatically sign modules is to make a soft link:

```
cd /etc/dkms  
ln -s kernel-sign.conf <module-name>.conf
```

For example: .. code-block:: bash

```
ln -s kernel-sign.conf vboxdrv.conf
```

The link creation can easily be added to an arch package to simplify further if desired.

## MODIFY PKGBUILD

### 5.1 What to change

We need to make changes to kernel build as follows:

### 5.2 prepare()

Add the following to the top of the prepare() function:

```
prepare() {  
    ...  
    echo "Rebuilding local signing key..."  
    # adjust cerdir as needed  
    certdir='../certs-local'  
    $certdir/genkeys.py -v --config ../config --refresh 30d  
    ...  
}
```

The default key regeneration refresh period is 7 days, but this can be changed on the command line. If you want to create new keys monthly, then use “--refresh 30days” as an option to genekeys.py. You can refresh on every build by using “--refresh always”. Refresh units can be seconds, minutes, hours, days or weeks.

### 5.3 \_package-headers()

Add the following to the bottom of the \_package-headers() function:

```
_package-headers() {  
    ...  
  
    #  
    # Out of Tree Module signing  
    # This is run in the kernel source / build directory  
    #  
    echo "Local Signing certs for out of tree modules..."  
  
    certs_local_src="../../certs-local"  
    certs_local_dst="${builddir}/certs-local"  
  
    ${certs_local_src}/install-certs.py $certs_local_dst
```

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```
# install dkms tools if needed
dkms_src="$certs_local_src/dkms"
dkms_dst="{pkgdir}/etc/dkms"
mkdir -p $dkms_dst

rsync -a $dkms_src/{kernel-sign.conf,kernel-sign.sh} $dkms_dst/
}
```

## REQUIRED FILES

This is the list of files referenced above. Remember to make scripts executable.

- `certs-local/genkeys.py`
- `certs-local/install-certs.py`
- `certs-local/x509.ooot.genkey`
- `certs-local/sign_module.py`
- `certs-local/lib/arg_parse.py`
- `certs-local/lib/refresh_needed.py`
- `certs-local/lib/class_genkeys.py`
- `certs-local/lib/get_key_hash.py`
- `certs-local/lib/make_keys.py`
- `certs-local/lib/signer_class.py`
- `certs-local/lib/update_config.py`
- `certs-local/lib/utils.py`
- `certs-local/dkms/kernel-sign.conf`
- `certs-local/dkms/kernel-sign.sh`





## ARCH AUR PACKAGS

### 7.1 AUR Packages

There is an [Arch Sign Modules](#) package in the AUR along with its companion github repo [Arch-SKM](#) which make use of [Kernel\\_Sign](#)

`arch-sign-modules` reduces the manual steps for building a fully signed custom kernel to 3 commands to *Update*, *Build* and *Install* a kernel.

```
abk -u kernel-name  
abk -b kernel-name  
abk -i kernel-name
```

For more information see [Arch-SKM-README](#) and example [Arch-SKM-PKGBUILD](#)



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## CHANGELOG

## 9.1 Tags

0.1.0 (2019-11-10) -> 4.0.0 (2025-05-21)  
104 commits.

## 9.2 Commits

- 2025-05-21 : 4.0.0

Tidy **and** Improve code:  
PEP-8, PEP-257, PEP-484 PEP-561  
Refactor  
Add tests : run pytest **in** the `*tests*` directory.  
This will locate **and** use a kernel provided tool:  
/usr/lib/modules/xxx/build/scripts/sign-file  
2024-12-31 update Docs/Changelog.rst Docs/kernel-sign.pdf

- 2024-12-31 : 3.0.2

Git tags are now signed.  
Update SPDX tags  
2023-11-05 update Docs/Changelog.rst Docs/kernel-sign.pdf

- 2023-11-05 : 3.0.1

fix readme.rst  
update Docs/Changelog.rst Docs/kernel-sign.pdf

- 2023-11-05 : 3.0.0

\* key **and** hash types are now read **from the** kernel config file. Keeps everything consistent.  
\* Code re-org **with** supporting modules now moved to lib/xxx.py  
\* Confirm code works **with hash type** `*sha3-512*` introduced **in** kernel 6.7  
Requires openssl 3.2+ / kernel 6.7+

- 2023-10-04 : 2.6.1

```
update Docs/Changelog.rst
Fix from Author: Expertcoderz <expertcoderzx@gmail.com>
Merge pull request #8 from Expertcoderz/patch-1
Fix -v argument help text f-string
Fix -v argument help text f-string
2023-09-27 update Docs/Changelog.rst
```

- 2023-09-27 : **2.6.0**

```
Reorganize documrnts under Docs.
Migrate to restructured text
Now easy to build html and pdf docs using sphinx
2023-03-31 update CHANGELOG.md
```

- 2023-03-31 : **2.5.1**

```
update changelog
small README wordsmithing
2023-03-30 update CHANGELOG.md
```

- 2023-03-30 : **2.5.0**

```
Use Full path to openssl executable /usr/bin/openssl
2023-01-06 Rename Changelog to CHANGELOG following our current release tools. Update
```

- 2023-01-06 : **2.4.0**

```
Add SPDX licensing lines
Update kernel doc reference link
2022-07-07 Update kernel.org doc link to more recent kernel
```

- 2022-05-25 : **2.3.9**

```
suppress a few silly pylint warnings
```

- 2022-05-21 : **2.3.8**

```
Remove unneeded exception we just added. It is a subclass of OSError and so
not needed.
```

- 2022-05-21 : **2.3.7**

```
utils open_file catches (OSError,FileNotFoundError) exceptions now
```

- 2022-05-18 : **2.3.6**

```
update changelog
Fix open_file to only apply encoding to text files (thanks pylint)
```

- 2022-05-18 : **2.3.5**

```
- More tidy up - try keep pylint noise down so dont miss things it finds
delete old stuff
comment tweak
```

- 2022-05-18 : 2.3.4

```
Update Changelog
More code tidying in genkeys
little more tidyup - no functional changes
2022-05-12 Add missing date to Changelog
```

- 2022-05-09 : 2.3.3

```
update Changelog
Use OSError exception which has replaced IOError
Catch OSError when file open fails
```

- 2022-05-08 : 2.3.2

```
Ack and Tested by by @itoffshore
update Changelog
trivial tidy
```

- 2022-05-08 : 2.3.1

```
more code tidying
Update Changelog
fix typo for refresh check
tidy and improve exception handling
tidy
more cleaning
more tidy
more tidy ups
some code tidying
another typo!
typo
fix file to name to avoid module conflict
```

- 2022-05-08 : 2.3.0

```
- Code re-org to be more robust and easier to read.
- Introduce KernelModSigner class and ModuleTool class to help organize
- Functionality is unchanged.
```

- 2022-05-04 : 2.2.1

```
Update Changelog and README to reflect sign_module.py replacing
sign_manual.sh
Changelog - add date for 2.2.0
```

- 2022-05-04 : 2.2.0

```
update changelog
archive sign_manual.sh
turn off dev to ready for production
Improve module signing scripts:
- sign_module.py replaces sign_manual.sh
- dkms/kernel_sign.sh updated accordingly
- install-certs updated accordingly
```

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2022-05-03 - adds dependency : python-zstandard **for** handling zst compressed modules  
README - small markdown tweaks

- 2022-05-03 : 2.1.1

update changelog  
typo

- 2022-05-03 : 2.1.0

update Changelog  
The key **type** **and** **hash** are now saved **in** files along side the keys. This allows the signing script to read them, **and** this means it no longer has hardcoded **hash**. the sign script falls back on sha512 **in** case of previous.  
↪key directory without a saved **hash**  
2022-05-02 remove extraneous |

- 2022-05-02 : 2.0.0

update changelog  
word smith README  
fix markdown on last addition

- 2022-05-02 : 1.3.5

Update README **and** Changelog  
Add few more words about some available tools by @itoffshore

- 2022-05-02 : 1.3.4

Update Changelog  
White space patches **from** @itoffshore

- 2022-05-02 : 1.3.3

Update Changelog  
Typo **in** echo found by @itoffshore  
Changelog update  
Add reference to @itoffshore aur package **and** github repo

- 2022-05-02 : 1.3.2

Fix hexdump typo "--e" to "-e"  
Changelog update  
Mindor markdown tweaks

- 2022-05-02 : 1.3.1

typo fix  
Update Changelog

- 2022-05-02 : 1.3.0



Per @ittoffshore, add comment about quoting wildcard characters

Fixes **from** @ittoffshore

1. For manual signing  
zstd modules use .zst instead of .zsrd  
support **for** gzip
2. For dkms  
Add gzip support

- 2022-05-01 : **1.2.0**

Expand help **with** reminder wildcards must be quoted

- 2022-05-01 : **1.1.0**

tweak the prepare() example  
small word smithing

- 2022-05-01 : **1.0.1**

remove debugging

- 2022-05-01 : **1.0.0**

2022-04-30      Update readme **and** changelog  
genkeys now handles multiple configs using shell glob **with** --config  
support utilities  
Rename tools to utils  
Share coupld functions via tools.py  
Add install-certs.py **for** use by package\_headers() to simplify PKGBUILD  
Update package\_headers() to remove reference to file no longer being  
created. Part of issue #3  
Add a little markdown to Changelog.md  
Update changes **for** 0.8.0 **and** 0.8.1

- 2022-04-30 : **0.8.1**

Remove references to now unused scripts

- 2022-04-30 : **0.8.0**

fix typo  
Tidy up README  
As per itoffshore check **for** key exists prior to getting mtime. Fixes bug **in**  
check\_refresh()

- 2022-04-30 : **0.7.0**

version [0.7.0]      -  
20220430  
- Add genkeys.py (replaces both genkeys.sh **and** fix\_config.sh)  
This supports refresh key frequency (default **is** 7 days)  
PKGBUILD use: ./genkeys.py -v  
Creates new keys **as** needed **and** updates kernel config.  
version [0.6.0]      -

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20220430

- Support zstd module compression **in** sign\_manual.sh
- Improve hexdump **for** signed module detection **in** sign\_manual.sh
- Has hardcoded sha512 **hash** - needs updating/replacing

version [0.5.0]

20220420

- Switch to using elliptic curve

- 2021-10-20 : **0.4.0**

Update kernel-sign.sh **for** compressed modules

- 2019-11-15 : **0.3.0**

Tidy Readme

- 2019-11-10 : **0.2.0**

tidy up readme

- 2019-11-10 : **0.1.0**

Initial revision

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## HOW TO HELP WITH THIS PROJECT

Thank you for your interest in improving this project. This project is open-source under the MIT license.

### 11.1 Important resources

- [Git Repo](#)

### 11.2 Reporting Bugs or feature requests

Please report bugs on the issue tracker in the git repo. To make the report as useful as possible, please include

- operating system used
- version of python
- explanation of the problem or enhancement request.

### 11.3 Code Changes

If you make code changes, please update the documentation if it's appropriate.



## CONTRIBUTOR COVENANT CODE OF CONDUCT

### 12.1 Our Pledge

In the interest of fostering an open and welcoming environment, we as contributors and maintainers pledge to making participation in our project and our community a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of age, body size, disability, ethnicity, sex characteristics, gender identity and expression, level of experience, education, socio-economic status, nationality, personal appearance, race, religion, or sexual identity and orientation.

### 12.2 Our Standards

Examples of behavior that contributes to creating a positive environment include:

- Using welcoming and inclusive language
- Being respectful of differing viewpoints and experiences
- Gracefully accepting constructive criticism
- Focusing on what is best for the community
- Showing empathy towards other community members

Examples of unacceptable behavior by participants include:

- The use of sexualized language or imagery and unwelcome sexual attention or advances
- Trolling, insulting/derogatory comments, and personal or political attacks
- Public or private harassment
- Publishing others' private information, such as a physical or electronic address, without explicit permission
- Other conduct which could reasonably be considered inappropriate in a professional setting

### 12.3 Our Responsibilities

Maintainers are responsible for clarifying the standards of acceptable behavior and are expected to take appropriate and fair corrective action in response to any instances of unacceptable behavior.

Maintainers have the right and responsibility to remove, edit, or reject comments, commits, code, wiki edits, issues, and other contributions that are not aligned to this Code of Conduct, or to ban temporarily or permanently any contributor for other behaviors that they deem inappropriate, threatening, offensive, or harmful.

## 12.4 Scope

This Code of Conduct applies both within project spaces and in public spaces when an individual is representing the project or its community. Examples of representing a project or community include using an official project e-mail address, posting via an official social media account, or acting as an appointed representative at an online or offline event. Representation of a project may be further defined and clarified by project maintainers.

## 12.5 Enforcement

Instances of abusive, harassing, or otherwise unacceptable behavior may be reported by contacting the project team at <arch@sapience.com>. All complaints will be reviewed and investigated and will result in a response that is deemed necessary and appropriate to the circumstances. The Code of Conduct Committee is obligated to maintain confidentiality with regard to the reporter of an incident. Further details of specific enforcement policies may be posted separately.

## 12.6 Attribution

This Code of Conduct is adapted from the Contributor Covenant, version 1.4, available at <https://www.contributor-covenant.org/version/1/4/code-of-conduct.html>

## 12.7 Interpretation

The interpretation of this document is at the discretion of the project team.



## INDICES AND TABLES

- `genindex`
- `modindex`
- `search`