

DNS-Based Authentication of Named Entities (DANE)  
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**Using DNS-Based Authentication of Named Entities (DANE) TLSA records  
with SRV and MX records.  
draft-ietf-dane-srv-03**

**Abstract**

The DANE specification ([RFC 6698](#)) describes how to use TLSA resource records in the DNS to associate a server's host name with its TLS certificate. The association is secured with DNSSEC. Some application protocols use SRV records ([RFC 2782](#)) to indirectly name the server hosts for a service domain (SMTP uses MX records for the same purpose). This specification gives generic instructions for how these application protocols locate and use TLSA records when technologies such as SRV records are used. Separate documents give the details that are specific to particular application protocols.

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## [1.](#) Introduction

The base DANE specification [[RFC6698](#)] describes how to use TLSA resource records in the DNS to associate a server's host name with its TLS certificate. The association is secured using DNSSEC. That document "only relates to securely associating certificates for TLS and DTLS with host names" (see the last paragraph of [section 1.2 of \[RFC6698\]](#)).

Some application protocols do not use host names directly; instead, they use a service domain and the relevant host names are located indirectly via SRV records [[RFC2782](#)], or MX records in the case of SMTP [[RFC5321](#)]. (Note: in the "CertID" specification [[RFC6125](#)], the source domain and host name are referred to as the "source domain")



and the "derived domain".) Because of this intermediate resolution step, the normal DANE rules specified in [\[RFC6698\]](#) do not directly apply to protocols that use SRV or MX records.

This document describes how to use DANE TLSA records with SRV and MX records. To summarize:

- o We rely on DNSSEC to secure the association between the service domain and the target server host names (i.e., the host names that are discovered by the SRV or MX query).
- o The TLSA records are located using the port, protocol, and target host name fields (not the service domain).
- o Clients always use TLS when connecting to servers with TLSA records.
- o Assuming that the association is secure, the server's certificate is expected to authenticate the target server host name, rather than the service domain.

Separate documents give the details that are specific to particular application protocols, such as SMTP [\[I-D.ietf-dane-smtp-with-dane\]](#) and XMPP [\[I-D.ietf-xmpp-dna\]](#).

## **2. Terminology**

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

## **3. Relation between SRV and MX records**

For the purpose of this specification (to avoid cluttering the description with special cases) we treat each MX record ([\[RFC5321\] section 5](#)) as being equivalent to an SRV record [\[RFC2782\]](#) with corresponding fields copied from the MX record and the remaining fields having fixed values as follows:

Service - smtp

Proto - tcp

Name - MX owner name (mail domain)

TTL - MX TTL



Class - MX Class

Priority - MX Priority

Weight - 0

Port - 25

Target - MX Target

Thus we can treat the following MX record as if it were the SRV record shown below:

```
example.com.          86400 IN MX  10      mx.example.net.
```

```
_smtp._tcp.example.com. 86400 IN SRV 10 0 25 mx.example.net.
```

Other details that are specific to SMTP are described in [\[I-D.ietf-dane-smtp-with-dane\]](#).

## **4. DNS Checks for TLSA and SRV Records**

### **4.1. SRV Query**

When the client makes an SRV query, a successful result will be a list of one or more SRV records (or possibly a chain of CNAME / DNAME aliases referring to such a list).

For this specification to apply, all of these DNS RRsets MUST be "secure" according to DNSSEC validation ([\[RFC4033\] section 5](#)). In the case of aliases, the whole chain MUST be secure as well as the ultimate target. (This corresponds to the AD bit being set in the response(s) - see [\[RFC4035\] section 3.2.3.](#))

If they are not all secure, this protocol has not been fully deployed. The client SHOULD fall back to its non-DNSSEC non-DANE behavior. (This corresponds to the AD bit being unset.)

If any of the responses is "bogus" according to DNSSEC validation, the client MUST abort. (This usually corresponds to a "server failure" response.)

In the successful case, the client now has an authentic list of server host names with weight and priority values. It performs server ordering and selection using the weight and priority values without regard to the presence or absence of DNSSEC or TLSA records. It takes note of the DNSSEC validation status of the SRV response for use when checking certificate names (see [Section 5](#)).



## 4.2. TLSA Queries

This sub-section applies to each server host name individually, provided the SRV response was secure according to DNSSEC validation.

The client SHALL construct the TLSA query name as described in [\[RFC6698\] section 3](#), based on fields from the SRV record: the port from the SRV RDATA, the protocol from the SRV query name, and the TLSA base domain set to the SRV target host name.

For example, the following SRV record leads to the TLSA query shown below:

```
_imap._tcp.example.com. 86400 IN SRV 10 0 143 imap.example.net.
```

```
_143._tcp.imap.example.net. IN TLSA ?
```

The client SHALL determine if the TLSA record(s) are usable according to [section 4.1 of \[RFC6698\]](#). This affects SRV handling as follows:

If the TLSA response is "secure", the client MUST use TLS when connecting to the server. The TLSA records are used when validating the server's certificate as described under [Section 5](#).

If the TLSA response is "insecure" or "indeterminate", the client SHALL proceed as if this server has no TLSA records. It MAY connect to the server with or without TLS.

If the TLSA response is "bogus", then the client MUST NOT connect to the corresponding server. (The client can still use other SRV targets.)

## 5. TLS Checks for TLSA and SRV Records

When connecting to a server, the client MUST use TLS if the responses to the SRV and TLSA queries were "secure" as described above. If the client received zero usable TLSA certificate associations, it SHALL validate the server's TLS certificate using the normal PKIX rules [\[RFC5280\]](#) or protocol-specific rules (e.g., following [\[RFC6125\]](#)) without further input from the TLSA records. If the client received one or more usable TLSA certificate associations, it SHALL process them as described in [\[RFC6698\] section 2.1](#).

The client uses the DNSSEC validation status of the SRV query in its server certificate identity checks. (The TLSA validation status does not affect the server certificate identity checks.) It SHALL use the Server Name Indication extension (TLS SNI) [\[RFC6066\]](#) or its functional equivalent in the relevant application protocol (e.g., in





XMPP [[RFC6120](#)] this is the the 'to' address of the initial stream header). The preferred name SHALL be chosen as follows, and the client SHALL verify the identity asserted by the server's certificate according to [[RFC6125](#)] [section 6](#), using a list of reference identifiers constructed as follows. (Note again that in [RFC 6125](#) the terms "source domain" and "derived domain" refer to the same things as "service domain" and "target host name" in this document.)

SRV is insecure or indeterminate: The reference identifiers SHALL include the service domain and MUST NOT include the SRV target host name. The service domain is the preferred name for TLS SNI or its equivalent.

SRV is secure: The reference identifiers SHALL include both the service domain and the SRV target host name. The target host name is the preferred name for TLS SNI or its equivalent.

(In the latter case, the client will accept either identity so that it is compatible with servers that do and do not support this specification.)

## **[6.](#) Guidance for Application Protocols**

Separate documents describe how to apply this specification to particular application protocols. If you are writing such as document the following points ought to be covered:

- o Fallback logic in the event of bogus replies and the like.
- o Compatibility with clients that do not support SRV lookups.

## **[7.](#) Guidance for Server Operators**

In order to support this specification, server software MUST implement the TLS Server Name Indication extension (TLS SNI) [[RFC6066](#)] (or its functional equivalent in the relevant application protocol) for selecting the appropriate certificate.

A server that supports TLS and is the target of an SRV record MUST have a TLS certificate that authenticates the SRV query domain (i.e. the service domain, or "source domain" in [[RFC6125](#)] terms). This is necessary for clients that cannot perform DNSSEC validation. This certificate MUST be the default that is presented if the client does not use TLS SNI or its functional equivalent.

In order to support this specification, the server SHOULD also have a certificate that authenticates the SRV target domain (e.g., the mail server hostname). This can be done using a multi-name certificate or



by using the client's TLS SNI or its functional equivalent to select the appropriate certificate. The server's TLSA record SHOULD correspond to this certificate.

Note: In some application protocols, there are old non-SRV clients that expect a server's TLS certificate to authenticate its host name; they are also unlikely to support SNI. This means that servers for old clients need a different default certificate from servers that are the targets of SRV records. If the server does not have a certificate that authenticates all relevant names, it is necessary to segregate old and new clients. This can be done by using different target hosts or non-standard ports in the SRV targets. (The latter avoids the need for additional certificates.)

## **8. Internationalization Considerations**

If any of the DNS queries are for an internationalized domain name, then they need to use the A-label form [[RFC5890](#)].

## **9. IANA Considerations**

No IANA action is required.

## **10. Security Considerations**

### **10.1. Mixed Security Status**

We do not specify that clients checking all of a service domain's server host names are consistent in whether they have or do not have TLSA records. This is so that partial or incremental deployment does not break the service. Different levels of deployment are likely if a service domain has a third-party fallback server, for example.

The SRV and MX sorting rules are unchanged; in particular they have not been altered in order to prioritize secure servers over insecure servers. If a site wants to be secure it needs to deploy this protocol completely; a partial deployment is not secure and we make no special effort to support it.

### **10.2. A Service Domain Trusts its Servers**



By signing their zone with DNSSEC, service domain operators implicitly instruct their clients to check their server TLSA records. This implies another point in the trust relationship between service domain holders and their server operators. Most of the setup requirements for this protocol fall on the server operator: installing a TLS certificate with the correct name, and publishing a TLSA record under that name. If these are not correct then connections from TLSA-aware clients might fail.

### **10.3. Certificate Subject Name Matching**

[Section 4](#) of the TLSA specification [[RFC6698](#)] leaves the details of checking names in certificates to higher level application protocols, though it suggests the use of [[RFC6125](#)].

Name checking might appear to be unnecessary, since DNSSEC provides a secure binding between the server name and the TLSA record, which in turn authenticates the certificate. However this latter step can be indirect, via a chain of certificates. A usage=0 TLSA record only authenticates the CA that issued the certificate, and third parties can obtain certificates from the same CA.

Therefore this specification says that a client needs to check whether the server's certificate matches the server host name, to ensure that the certificate was issued by the CA to the server that the client is connecting to. The client always performs this check regardless of the TLSA usage, to simplify implementation and so that this specification is less likely to need updating when new TLSA usages are added.

### **10.4. Deliberate Omissions**

We do not specify that clients check the DNSSEC state of the server address records. This is not necessary since the certificate checks ensure that the client has connected to the correct server. (The address records will normally have the same security state as the TLSA records, but they can differ if there are CNAME or DNAME indirections.)

## **11. Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Mark Andrews for arguing that authenticating the server host name is the right thing, and that we ought to rely on DNSSEC to secure the SRV / MX lookup. Thanks to James Cloos, Ned Freed, Olafur Gudmundsson, Paul Hoffman, Phil Pennock, Hector Santos, Jonas Schneider, and Alessandro Vesely for helpful suggestions.



## **12. References**

### **12.1. Normative References**

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- [RFC6120] Saint-Andre, P., "Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol (XMPP): Core", [RFC 6120](#), March 2011.
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- [RFC6698] Hoffman, P. and J. Schlyter, "The DNS-Based Authentication of Named Entities (DANE) Transport Layer Security (TLS) Protocol: TLSA", [RFC 6698](#), August 2012.





## **12.2. Informative References**

- [I-D.ietf-dane-smtp-with-dane]  
Dukhovni, V. and W. Hardaker, "(DANE) TLSA records.",  
[draft-ietf-dane-smtp-with-dane](#) (work in progress),  
November 2013.
- [I-D.ietf-xmpp-dna]  
Saint-Andre, P. and M. Miller, "Domain Name Associations  
(DNA) in the Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol  
(XMPP)", [draft-ietf-xmpp-dna-04](#) (work in progress),  
October 2013.

## **Appendix A. Example**

In the following, most of the DNS resource data is elided for simplicity.

```
; mail domain
example.com.           MX      1 mx.example.net.
example.com.           RRSIG   MX ...

; SMTP server host name
mx.example.net.        A       192.0.2.1
mx.example.net.        AAAA    2001:db8:212:8::e:1

; TLSA resource record
_25._tcp.mx.example.net.  TLSA   ...
_25._tcp.mx.example.net.  RRSIG  TLSA ...
```

Mail for addresses at example.com is delivered by SMTP to mx.example.net. Connections to mx.example.net port 25 that use STARTTLS will get a server certificate that authenticates the name mx.example.net.

## **Appendix B. Rationale**

The long-term goal of this specification is to settle on TLS certificates that verify the server host name rather than the service domain, since this is more convenient for servers hosting multiple domains (so-called "multi-tenanted environments") and scales up more easily to larger numbers of service domains.

There are a number of other reasons for doing it this way:

- o The certificate is part of the server configuration, so it makes sense to associate it with the server host name rather than the service domain.



- o In the absence of TLS SNI, if the certificate identifies the host name then it does not need to list all the possible service domains.
- o When the server certificate is replaced it is much easier if there is one part of the DNS that needs updating to match, instead of an unbounded number of hosted service domains.
- o The same TLSA records work with this specification, and with direct connections to the host name in the style of [[RFC6698](#)].
- o Some application protocols, such as SMTP, allow a client to perform transactions with multiple service domains in the same connection. It is not in general feasible for the client to specify the service domain using TLS SNI when the connection is established, and the server might not be able to present a certificate that authenticates all possible service domains.
- o It is common for SMTP servers to act in multiple roles, for example as outgoing relays or as incoming MX servers, depending on the client identity. It is simpler if the server can present the same certificate regardless of the role in which it is to act. Sometimes the server does not know its role until the client has authenticated, which usually occurs after TLS has been established.

This specification does not provide an option to put TLSA records under the service domain because that would add complexity without providing any benefit, and security protocols are best kept simple. As described above, there are real-world cases where authenticating the service domain cannot be made to work, so there would be complicated criteria for when service domain TLSA records might be used and when they cannot. This is all avoided by putting the TLSA records under the server host name.

The disadvantage is that clients which do not do DNSSEC validation must, according to [[RFC6125](#)] rules, check the server certificate against the service domain, since they have no other way to authenticate the server. This means that SNI support or its functional equivalent is necessary for backward compatibility.

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