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T. Reddy  
McAfee  
N. Cook  
Open-Xchange  
D. Wing  
Citrix  
M. Boucadair  
Orange  
January 14, 2021

**DNS Access Denied Error Page**  
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Abstract

When a DNS server filters a query, the response to such query conveys no detailed explanation that explains why that query was blocked, leading thus to end-user confusion. A solution to this problem is needed in order to enhance the user experience.

This document defines a method to return an URI that explains the reason why a DNS query was filtered by a DNS server.

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## [1.](#) Introduction

DNS filters are deployed for a variety of reasons, including endpoint security, parental filtering, and filtering required by law enforcement. Some of these reasons are discussed in more detail below:

- o Various network security services are provided by Enterprise networks to protect endpoints (e.g., Hosts including IoT devices). Network-based security solutions such as firewalls and Intrusion Prevention Systems (IPS) rely upon network traffic inspection to implement perimeter-based security policies. The network security services may, for example, prevent malware download, block known malicious domains, block phishing sites, etc. These network security services act on DNS queries originating from endpoints. For example, DNS firewalls, a method of expressing DNS response policy information inside specially constructed DNS zones, known as Response Policy Zones (RPZs) allows DNS servers to modify their DNS responses in real time in order to stop access to malware and phishing domains. Note that some of the commonly known types of malware are viruses, worms, trojans, bots, ransomware, backdoors, spyware, and adware.



- o Network devices in a home network offer network security to protect the devices within the home network by performing DNS-based content filtering. The network security service may, for example, block access to specific domains to enforce parental control, block access to malware sites, etc.
- o Internet Service Providers (ISPs) typically block access to some domains due to a requirement imposed by an external entity (e.g., Law Enforcement Agency) by performing DNS-based content filtering.

DNS responses can be filtered by sending a bogus (also called, "forged") A or AAAA response, NXDOMAIN error or empty answer, or an extended DNS error (EDE) code defined in [[RFC8914](#)]. Each of these methods have advantages and disadvantages that are discussed below:

1. The DNS response is forged to provide a list of IP addresses that point to an HTTP(S) server alerting the end user of the reason for blocking access to the requested domain (e.g., malware). When an HTTP(S) enabled domain name is blocked, the network security device (e.g., CPE, firewall) presents a block page instead of the HTTP response from the content provider hosting that domain. If an HTTP enabled domain name is blocked, the network security device intercepts the HTTP request and returns a block page over HTTP. If an HTTPS enabled domain is blocked, the block page is also served over HTTPS. In order to return a block page over HTTPS, man in the middle (MITM) is enabled on endpoints by generating a local root certificate and an accompanying (local) public/private key pair. The local root certificate is installed on the endpoint while the network security device(s) stores a copy of the private key. During the TLS handshake, the network security device modifies the certificate provided by the server and (re)signs it with the private key from the local root certificate.
  - \* However, configuring the local root certificate on endpoints is not a viable option in several deployments like home networks, schools, Small Office/Home Office (SOHO), and Small/Medium Enterprise (SME). In these cases, the typical behavior is that the forged DNS response directs the user towards a server hosted to display the block page which breaks the TLS connection. For web-browsing this then results in an HTTPS certificate error message indicating that a secure connection could not be established, which gives no information to the end-user about the reason for the error. The typical errors are "The security certificate presented by this website was not issued by a trusted certificate authority" (Internet Explorer/Edge), "The site's security certificate is not trusted" (Chrome), "This Connection is Untrusted" (Firefox),



"Safari can't verify the identity of the website..." (Safari on MacOS)".

- \* Enterprise networks do not assume that all the connected devices are managed by the IT team or Mobile Device Management (MDM) devices, especially in the quite common Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) scenario. In addition, the local root certificate cannot be installed on IoT devices without a device management tool.
  - \* An end user does not know why the connection was reset and, consequently, may repeatedly try to reach the domain but with no success. Frustrated, the end user may switch to an alternate network that offers no DNS-level protection against malware and phishing, potentially compromising both security and privacy. Furthermore, certificate errors train users to click through certificate errors, which is a bad security practice. To eliminate the need for an end user to click through certificate errors, an end user may manually install a local root certificate on a host device (e.g. [\[Chrome-Install-Cert\]](#)). Doing so, however, is also a bad security practice as it creates a security vulnerability that may be exploited by a MITM attack. When a manually installed local root certificate expires, the user has to (again) manually install the new local root certificate.
2. The DNS response is forged to provide a NXDOMAIN response to cause the DNS lookup to terminate in failure. In this case, an end user does not know why the domain cannot be reached and may repeatedly try to reach the domain but with no success. Frustrated, the end user may use insecure connections to reach the domain, potentially compromising both security and privacy.
  3. The extended error codes Blocked, Censored, and Filtered defined in [Section 4 of \[RFC8914\]](#) can be returned by a DNS server to provide additional information about the cause of an DNS error. If the extended error code "Forged Answer" defined in [Section 4.5 of \[RFC8914\]](#) is returned by the DNS server, the client can identify the DNS response is forged together with the reason for HTTPS certificate error.

These extended error codes do not suffer from the limitations discussed in bullets (1) and (2), but the user still does not know the exact reason nor he/she is aware of the exact entity blocking the access to the domain. For example, a DNS server may block access to a domain based on the content category such as "Adult Content" to enforce parental control, "Violence & Terrorism" due to an external requirement imposed by an external



entity (e.g., Law Enforcement Agency), etc. These content categories cannot be standardized because the classification of domains into content categories is vendor specific, typically ranges from 40 to 100 types of categories depending on the vendor and the categories keep evolving. Furthermore, the threat data used to categorize domains may sometimes misclassify domains (e.g., domains wrongly classified as Domain Generation Algorithm (DGA) by deep learning techniques, domain wrongly classified as phishing due to crowd sourcing, new domains not categorized by the threat data). A user needs to know the contact details of the IT/InfoSec team to raise a complaint.

4. The EXTRA-TEXT field of the EDE option defined in [Section 2 of \[RFC8914\]](#) can include additional textual information about the cause of the error, but the information could be provided in a language that is not understood by the user. When a resolver or forwarder forwards the received EDE option, the EXTRA-TEXT field only conveys the source of the error ([Section 3 of \[RFC8914\]](#)) and does not provide additional textual information about the cause of the error. Most importantly, EDE option does not offer authenticated information; it can thus be spoofed by an attacker. In addition, the additional textual information may not be able to convey all of the required information about the cause of the DNS error because lengthy EXTRA-TEXT content would be truncated to prevent fragmentation ([Section 3 of \[RFC8914\]](#)).

No matter which type of response is generated (forged IP address(es), NXDOMAIN or empty answer, or an extended error code), the user who generated the query has little chance to understand which entity filtered the query, how to report a mistake in the filter, or why the entity filtered it at all. This document describes a mechanism to provide a URI which, when accessed, provides such information to the user.

One of the other benefits of this approach is to eliminate the need to "spoof" block pages for HTTPS resources, as the block page no longer needs to create a signed certificate when blocking a destination. Also, the approach avoids the need to install a local root certificate authority on those IT-managed devices.

## 2. Terminology

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [BCP 14 \[RFC2119\]](#) [RFC8174] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.





This document makes use of the terms defined in [RFC8499] and [I-D.ietf-dnsop-terminology-ter].

'Encrypted DNS' refers to any encrypted scheme to convey DNS messages, for example, DNS-over-HTTPS [RFC8484], DNS-over-TLS [RFC7858], or DNS-over-QUIC [I-D.ietf-dprive-dnsquic].

### 3. Error page URI EDNS0 Option Format

This document uses an EDNS0 [RFC6891] option to include the URI that gives additional information in a DNS response about the cause of blocking access to a domain. This option is structured as depicted in Figure 1.

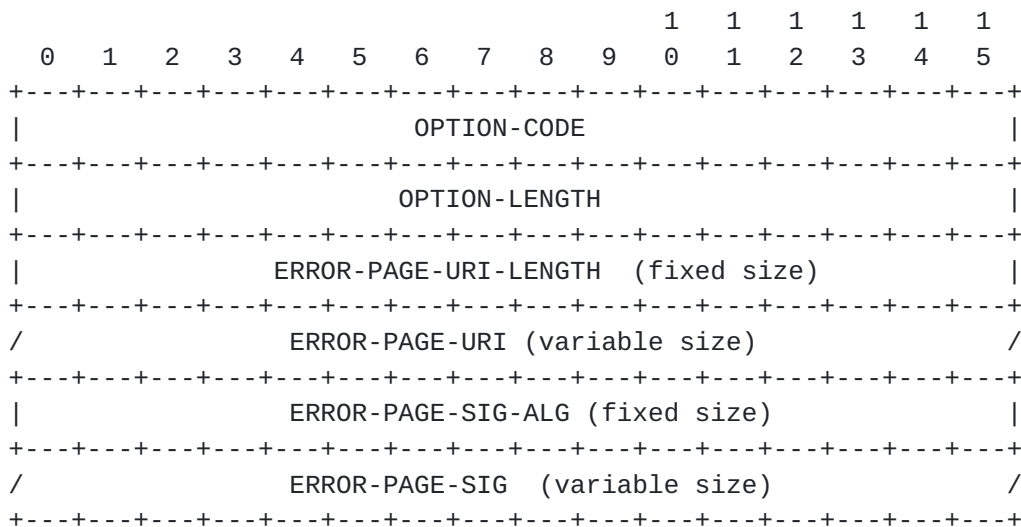


Figure 1: Error page URI EDNS0 Option Format

The description of the fields is as follows:

- o OPTION-CODE: TBD, indicates the code assigned for Error page URI (Section 6.1.2 of [RFC6891]). [RFC Editor: change TBD to the proper code once assigned by IANA.]
- o OPTION-LENGTH: See Section 6.1.2 of [RFC6891]. This field contains the length of the payload (everything after OPTION-LENGTH) in octets. The variability of the option length stems from the variable-length ERROR-PAGE-URI and ERROR-PAGE-SIG fields.
- o ERROR-PAGE-URI-LENGTH: This 16-bit field indicates the length of ERROR-PAGE-URI. It MUST NOT be set to 0.
- o ERROR-PAGE-URI: A variable length UTF-8 encoded [RFC5198] text field containing the URI Template [RFC6570] that gives additional



information about the cause of blocking access to a domain. The ERROR-PAGE-URI field MUST NOT be zero octets in length.

- o ERROR-PAGE-SIG-ALG: A 16-bits field that contains the algorithm used to generate the signature for the Error Page URI Template. The values are defined in the TLS SignatureScheme [[TLS-SIG-SCHEME](#)] with limitations described in [Section 5](#).
- o ERROR-PAGE-SIG, a variable length field containing the signature of the Error Page URI Template. The signature generation process is discussed in [Section 5](#).

The Error page URI option can be included in any response (SERVFAIL, NXDOMAIN, REFUSED, and even NOERROR, etc) to a query that includes OPT Pseudo-RR [[RFC6891](#)].

The URI Template defined in ERROR-PAGE-URI describes how to construct the URL to fetch the error page. The agent acting as HTTPS client on the endpoint encodes a FQDN to which access is denied into an HTTP GET request to retrieve the error page. The HTTPS server returning the error page defines the URI used by the HTTP GET request through the use of a URI Template. The URI Template is processed with a defined variable "target-domain" whose value is set to the FQDN to which access is denied. The FQDN is encoded using base64url [[RFC4648](#)] and then provided as the variable value for "target-domain" to expand the URI Template into a URI reference in the HTTP GET request. Padding characters for base64url MUST NOT be included.

An example is illustrated below:

If the URI Template is "https://block.example.net/block-page{?target-domain}" for the HTTPS server returning the error page and access to the target domain "example.com" is blocked by the encrypted DNS server, the variable "target-domain" has the value "example.com" base64url encoded into an HTTP GET request. In the above example, the expansion of the above URI Template is "https://block.example.net/block-page?target-domain=ZXhhbXBsZS5jb20".

HTTP/2 [[RFC7540](#)] is the minimum RECOMMENDED HTTP version to use to retrieve the error page. The HTTPS client retrieving the error page MUST verify the entire certification path as per [[RFC5280](#)]. The HTTPS client additionally uses validation techniques described in [[RFC6125](#)] to compare the domain name in the error page URI to the server certificate provided in TLS handshake. See [[RFC7525](#)] for additional TLS recommendations.



#### **4. Error Page URI Processing**

The DNS client MUST follow the following rules to process the Error Page URI EDNS0 option:

- o The Error Page URI EDNS0 option is susceptible to forgery. In order to defend against this attack the DNS client MUST NOT process the DNS response with Error Page URI EDNS0 option unless DNS messages exchanged are cryptographically protected using encrypted DNS.
- o If an DNS client has enabled opportunistic privacy profile ([Section 5 of \[RFC8310\]](#)) for DoT, the DNS client will either fallback to an encrypted connection without authenticating the DNS server provided by the local network or fallback to clear text DNS, and cannot exchange encrypted DNS messages. The fallback adversely impacts security and privacy. If the DNS client has enabled opportunistic privacy profile for DoT, the client MUST NOT process the DNS response with Error Page URI EDNS0 option.
- o If an DNS client has enabled strict privacy profile ([Section 5 of \[RFC8310\]](#)) for DoT, the DNS client requires an encrypted connection and successful authentication of the DNS server; this mitigates both passive eavesdropping and client redirection (at the expense of providing no DNS service if an encrypted, authenticated connection is not available). If the DNS client has enabled strict privacy profile for DoT, the client can process the DNS response with Error Page URI EDNS0 option. Note that the strict and opportunistic privacy profiles as defined in [\[RFC8310\]](#) only applies to DoT protocol, there has been no such distinction made for DoH protocol.
- o If the DNS response contains more than one Error Page URI EDNS0 option, the DNS client MUST discard all Error Page URI EDNS0 options in the DNS response.
- o The Error Page URI EDNS0 option MUST be processed by the DNS client for a "Censored", "Blocked", "Filtered" or "Forged" extended error codes and MUST be ignored for any other type of extended DNS error code. When "Censored", "Blocked", "Filtered" or "Forged" extended error code is returned in conjunction with an Error Page URI EDNS0 option, any other resource records in the answer MUST be ignored by clients supporting this specification.
- o If the DNS client determines that the encrypted DNS server does not offer DNS filtering service, it MUST reject the Error Page URI EDNS0 option. For example, the DNS client knows whether the pre-



configured encrypted DNS resolver performs DNS-based content filtering or not.

- o The DNS client MUST reject the error page URI if the scheme is not "https".
- o The DNS client verifies the signature in the ERROR-PAGE-SIG field (Figure 1) following the mechanism discussed in [Section 5](#). If the signature is valid, the client can positively identify that the Error Page URI EDNS0 option has been generated by the encrypted DNS server and the encrypted DNS server did not forward the Error Page URI EDNS0 option from an upstream resolver. If signature validation fails, the DNS client MUST reject the Error Page URI EDNS0 option.

A DNS resolver or forwarder MUST NOT propagate a received Error Page URI EDNS0 option over an unencrypted connection because an attacker can insert a bogus URI. However, when a resolver or forwarder receives an Error Page URI EDNS0 option over an encrypted connection, whether or not to pass along Error Page URI EDNS0 option on to the original client is implementation dependent. If the Implementation chooses to forward the Error Page URI EDNS0 option received over an encrypted connection, it MUST create a new Error Page URI EDNS0 option that conveys the URI in the received Error Page URI EDNS0 option after successful signature validation. The signature for the new Error Page URI EDNS0 option MUST be generated using the private key of the DNS resolver or forwarder end-entity certificate used in the TLS connection to the original client. If signature validation fails for the received Error Page URI EDNS0 option, the DNS resolver or forwarder end-entity certificate MUST reject the Error Page URI EDNS0 option.

The DNS resolver or forwarder MUST NOT modify the ERROR-PAGE-URI field (Figure 1) in the forwarded Error Page URI EDNS0 option.

If the resolver or forwarder simply forwards the received Error Page URI EDNS0 option without updating the signature in the ERROR-PAGE-SIG field (Figure 1), signature validation by the original client will fail and the forwarded Error Page URI EDNS0 option will be rejected. As a reminder, [Section 3 of \[RFC8914\]](#) discusses the source of the error should be attributed in the EXTRA-TEXT field, since an EDNS0 option received by the original client will appear to have come from the resolver or forwarder sending it. Because DNS forwarders (or DNS proxies) are supposed to propagate unknown EDNS0 options (Sections 4.1 and 4.4.1 of [\[RFC5625\]](#)), the Error Page URI EDNS0 option may get propagated. To detect this scenario, the Error Page URI Template is protected with an object signature as described in [Section 5](#) to provide authenticated information.





## 5. Sign and Verify

The algorithms for generating signature for DNS resource record sets (RRsets) are defined in [[DNSKEY-IANA](#)]. The "mandatory-to-implement" algorithms are RSA, Elliptic Curve Digital Signature Algorithm (ECDSA), and Edwards-curve Digital Security Algorithm (EdDSA) [[RFC8624](#)]. Along similar lines, the encrypted DNS server's end-entity certificate's public key and the signature algorithm with which the key can be used are RSA, ECDSA, and EdDSA [[RFC8446](#)]. If ECDSA is used, it is RECOMMENDED to use the deterministic digital signature generation procedure of the ECDSA, specified in [[RFC6979](#)].

The signature is generated by the encrypted DNS server using the Error Page URI Template, private key of the encrypted DNS server's end-entity certificate as inputs to the signature algorithm. The signature algorithm in the ERROR-PAGE-SIG-ALG field MUST be compatible with the key in the DNS server's end-entity certificate. The implementation MUST support the same set of algorithms in the TLS client for validating the signature in the CertificateVerify message from the server in the TLS handshake and in the DNS client to validate the signature for the Error Page URI Template. As a reminder, the server's end-entity certificate's public key will be compatible with the selected authentication algorithm from the client's "signature\_algorithms" TLS extension ([Section 4.4.2.2 of \[RFC8446\]](#)).

If the signature algorithm in the ERROR-PAGE-SIG-ALG field is not compatible with the key in the DNS server's end-entity certificate, the DNS client MUST reject the Error Page URI EDNS0 option. The DNS client verifies the signature using the signature in the ERROR-PAGE-SIG field, Error Page URI Template and DNS server's end-entity certificate's public key as inputs to the signature algorithm. For example, if Ed25519 is used, Ed25519 signature algorithm and verification of the Ed25519 signature are described in Sections [5.1.6](#) and [5.1.7](#) of [[RFC8032](#)], respectively.

## 6. Error Page

The following outlines the RECOMMENDED contents of an error page to assist the operator developing the error page:

- o The exact reason for blocking access to the domain. If the domain is blocked based on some threat data, the threat type associated with the blocked domain can be provided/displayed to the end user. For example, the reason can indicate the type of malware blocked like spyware and the damage it can do the security and privacy of the user.



- o The domain name blocked.
- o If query was blocked by regulation, a pointer to a regulatory text that mandates this query block.
- o The entity (or organization) blocking the access to the domain and contact details of the IT/InfoSec team to raise a complaint.
- o The blocked error page to not include Ads and dynamic content.

The content of the error page discussed above is non-normative, the above text only provides the guidelines and template for the error page and:

- o does not attempt to offer an exhaustive list for the contents of an error page.
- o it is not intended to form the basis of any legal/compliance for developing the error page.

## **7. Usability Considerations**

The error page SHOULD be returned in the user's preferred language as expressed by the Accept-Language HTTP header.

## **8. Security Considerations**

Security considerations in [Section 6 of \[RFC8914\]](#) and [\[RFC8624\]](#) need to be taken into consideration.

The Error Page URI EDNS0 option causes an HTTPS retrieval by the client. To prevent forgery of the Error Page URI EDNS0 option, this specification requires it only be sent only over an encrypted DNS channel with an authorized DNS server.

The client knows it is connecting to a HTTPS server returning the error page. To reduce threat surface the client can retrieve the Error page URL using, for example, an isolated environment and take other precautions such as clearly labeling the page as untrusted or prevent user interaction with the page. Such isolation should prevent transmitting cookies, block JavaScript, block auto-fill of credentials or personal information, and be isolated from the user's normal environment.

Browsers perform some of the above restrictions when accessing captive portals ([Section 5 of \[RFC8910\]](#) or [\[Safari-Cookie\]](#)), during private browsing, or using containerization [\[Facebook-Container\]](#).



Note that the means to use a sandbox environment and a user interface presenting the error page are not covered in this document. By its nature, these aspects are implementation specific and best left to the application and user interface designers.

The encrypted DNS session provides transport security for the interaction between the DNS client and server, but DNSSEC signing and validation is not possible for the Error Page URI EDNS0 option returning the Error Page URI Template. However, the signature in the Error Page URI EDNS0 option provides authentication for the Error Page URI EDNS0 option.

By design, the object referenced by the error page URL potentially exposes additional information about the DNS resolution process that may leak information. An example of this is the reason for blocking the access to the domain name and the entity blocking access to the domain.

## **9. IANA Considerations**

### **9.1. A New Error Page URI EDNS Option**

This document defines a new EDNS(0) option, entitled "Error Page URI", assigned a value of TBD from the "DNS EDNS0 Option Codes (OPT)" registry [to be removed upon publication:  
[<http://www.iana.org/assignments/dns-parameters/dns-parameters.xhtml#dns-parameters-11>]

| Value | Name           | Status   | Reference         |
|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| ----- | -----          | -----    | -----             |
| TBD   | Error Page URI | Standard | [ This document ] |

## **10. Acknowledgements**

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Authors' Addresses

Tirumaleswar Reddy  
McAfee, Inc.  
Embassy Golf Link Business Park  
Bangalore, Karnataka 560071  
India

Email: kondtir@gmail.com

Neil Cook  
Open-Xchange  
UK

Email: neil.cook@noware.co.uk

Dan Wing  
Citrix Systems, Inc.  
USA

Email: dwing-ietf@fuggles.com

Mohamed Boucadair  
Orange  
Rennes 35000  
France

Email: mohamed.boucadair@orange.com

