6man
Internet-Draft
Updates: 2460 (if approved)
Intended status: Best Current Practice
Expires: February 22, 2016

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August 21, 2015

Transmission and Processing of IPv6 Options
draft-gont-6man-ipv6-opt-transmit-02.txt

Abstract

Various IPv6 options have been standardized since the core IPv6 standard was first published. This document updates RFC 2460 to clarify how nodes should deal with such IPv6 options and with any options that are defined in the future. It complements [RFC7045], which offers a similar clarification regarding IPv6 Extension Headers.

Status of This Memo

This Internet-Draft is submitted in full conformance with the provisions of BCP 78 and BCP 79.

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This Internet-Draft will expire on February 22, 2016.

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1. Introduction and Problem Statement

Various IPv6 options have been standardized since the core IPv6 standard [RFC2460] was first published. Except for the padding options (Pad1 and PadN), all the options that have so far been specified are meant to be employed with specific IPv6 Extension Header (EH) types. Additionally, some options have specific requirements such as, for example, only allowing a single instance of the option in the corresponding IPv6 extension header. This establishes some criteria for validating packets that employ IPv6 options.

[RFC2460] specifies that IPv6 extension headers (with the exception of the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header) are not examined or processed by any node along a packet's delivery path, until the packet reaches the node (or each of the set of nodes, in the case of multicast) identified in the Destination Address field of the IPv6 header. However, in practice this is not really the case: some routers, and a variety of middleboxes such as firewalls, load balancers, or packet classifiers, might inspect other parts of each packet [RFC7045]. Hence both end-nodes an intermediate nodes may end up inspecting the contents of extension headers and discard packets based on the presence of specific IPv6 options.

This document clarifies the default processing of IPv6 options. In those cases in which the specifications add additional constraints/ requirements regarding IPv6 options, such additional constraints/ requirements are also taken into account.

2. Terminology and Conventions Used in This Document

2.1. Terminology

In the remainder of this document, the term "forwarding node" refers to any router, firewall, load balancer, prefix translator, or any other device or middlebox that forwards IPv6 packets with or without examining the packet in any way.

In this document, "standard" IPv6 options are those specified in detail by IETF Standards Actions [RFC5226]. "Experimental" options include those defined by any Experimental RFC and the option types 0x1E, 0x3E, 0x5E, 0x7E, 0x9E, 0xBE, 0xDE, and 0xFE, defined by [RFC3692] and [RFC4727] when used as experimental options. "Defined" options are the "standard" options plus the "experimental" ones.

The terms "permit" (allow the traffic), "drop" (drop with no notification to sender), and "reject" (drop with appropriate notification to sender) are employed as defined in [RFC3871]. Throughout this document we also employ the term "discard" as a generic term to indicate the act of discarding a packet, irrespective of whether the sender is notified of such packet drops.

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].

2.2. Conventions

This document clarifies some basic validation of IPv6 options, and specifies the default processing of them. We recommend that a configuration option is made available to govern the processing of each IPv6 option type, on a per-EH-type granularity. Such configuration options may include the following possible settings:

- Permit this IPv6 Option type
- Drop (and log) packets containing this IPv6 option type
- Reject (and log) packets containing this IPv6 option type (where the packet drop is signaled with an ICMPv6 error message)

- o Rate-limit the processing of packets containing this IPv6 option type
- o Ignore this IPv6 option type (forwarding packets that contain them)

We note that special care needs to be taken when devices log packet drops/rejects. Devices should count the number of packets dropped/ rejected, but the logging of drop/reject events should be limited so as to not overburden device resources.

Finally, we note that when discarding packets, it is generally desirable that the sender be signaled of the packet drop, since this is of use for trouble-shooting purposes. However, throughout this document (when recommending that packets be discarded) we generically refer to the action as "discard" without specifying whether the sender is signaled of the packet drop.

3. Considerations for All IPv6 Options

Forwarding nodes that discard packets (by default) based on the presence of IPv6 options are known to cause connectivity failures and deployment problems. Any forwarding node along an IPv6 packet's path, which forwards the packet for any reason, SHOULD do so regardless of any IPv6 Destination Options that are present, as required by [RFC2460]. Exceptionally, if a forwarding node is designed to examine IPv6 Destination Options for any reason, such as firewalling, it MUST recognise and deal appropriately with all standard IPv6 options types and SHOULD recognise and deal appropriately with all experimental IPv6 options. The list of standard and experimental option types is maintained by IANA (see [IANA-IPV6-PARAM]), and implementors are advised to check this list regularly for updates.

In the case of some options meant to be included in IPv6 extension headers other than Hop-by-Hop Options, [RFC2460] requires destination hosts to discard the corresponding packet if the option is unrecognised. However, intermediate forwarding nodes SHOULD NOT do this, since doing so might cause them to inadvertently discard traffic using a recently standardised IPv6 option not yet recognised by the intermediate node. The exceptions to this rule are discussed next.

If a forwarding node discards a packet containing a standard IPv6 option, it MUST be the result of a configurable policy and not just the result of a failure to recognise such an option. This means that the discard policy for each standard type of IPv6 option MUST be

individually configurable. The default configuration SHOULD allow all standard IPv6 options.

Experimental IPv6 options SHOULD be treated in the same way as standard IPv6 options, including an individually configurable discard policy.

A node that processes the contents of an extension header MUST discard the corresponding packet if it contains any defined options that are not meant for the extension header being processed. This document requests IANA to add a new column to [IANA-IPV6-PARAM] to clearly mark the IPv6 Extension Header type(s) for which each option (defined by IETF Standards Action or IESG Approval) is valid.

A node that processes the contents of an IPv6 extension header MAY discard the corresponding packet if it contains any options that have become deprecated. Whether or not such packets are dropped SHOULD be configurable, and the default setting MUST be to not drop such packets.

A node that processes the contents of an extension header and encounters an undefined (unrecognised) IPv6 option MUST react to such option according to the highest-order two bits of the option type, as specified by Section 4.2 of [RFC2460].

A node that processes an IPv6 extension header MAY discard a packet containing any experimental IPv6 options.

4. Processing of currently-defined IPv6 Options

The following subsections provide advice on how to process the IPv6 options that have been defined at the time of this writing, according to the rules specified in the previous sections.

4.1. Hop-by-Hop Options Header

A node that processes the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header MUST discard the corresponding packet if it contains any options that are not valid for the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header [IANA-IPV6-PARAM].

A node that processes the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header MUST discard a packet containing multiple instances (i.e., more than one) of this option in the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header:

- Type 0x05: Router Alert [RFC2711]

NOTE: The rationale for discarding the packet is that [RFC2711] forbids multiple instances of this option.

A node that processes the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header MUST discard a packet that carries a Fragment Header and also contains this option in the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header:

- Type 0xC2: Jumbo Payload [RFC2675]

  NOTE: The rationale for discarding the packet is that [RFC2675] forbids the use of the Jumbo Payload Option in packets that carry a Fragment Header.

A node that processes the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header MAY discard a packet containing any of the following options in that header:

- Type=0x4D: Deprecated

  NOTE: The rationale for discarding the packet is that the aforementioned option has been deprecated.

A node that processes the Hop-by-Hop Options extension header MAY discard a packet containing any of the following options in that header:

- Type 0x1E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]
- Type 0x3E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]
- Type 0x5E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]
- Type 0x7E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]
- Type 0x9E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]
- Type 0xBE: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]
- Type 0xDE: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]
- Type 0xFE: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

  NOTE: This is in line with the corresponding specification in [RFC7045] for experimental extension headers.

4.2. Destination Options Header

A node that processes the Destination Options header MUST discard a packet containing any options that are not valid for the Destination Options header [IANA-IPV6-PARAM].

A node that processes the Destination Options extension header MAY discard a packet containing any of the following options in that header:

- Type 0x8A: Endpoint Identification [nimrod-eid] [NIMROD-DOC]

- Type 0x4D: Deprecated

  NOTE: The rationale for discarding the packet is that the aforementioned options have been deprecated.

A node that processes the Destination Options extension header MAY discard a packet containing any of the following options in that header:

- Type 0x1E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

- Type 0x3E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

- Type 0x5E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

- Type 0x7E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

- Type 0x9E: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

- Type 0xBE: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

- Type 0xDE: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

- Type 0xFE: RFC3692-style Experiment [RFC4727]

  NOTE: This is in line with the corresponding specification in [RFC7045] for experimental extension headers.

5. IANA Considerations

IANA is requested to add an extra column entitled "Extension Header Types" to the "Destination Options and Hop-by-Hop Options" registry [IANA-IPV6-PARAM], to clearly mark the IPv6 Extension Header types for which each option (defined by IETF Standards Action or IESG Approval) is valid (see the list below). This also applies to Destination Options and Hop-by-Hop Options defined in the future.

What follows is the initial list of IPv6 options and the corresponding marks that indicate which Extension Header type(s) these IPv6 options are valid for:

Hex Value	Description	Reference	EH Types
0x00	Pad1	[RFC2460]	DH
0x01	PadN	[RFC2460]	DH
0xC2	Jumbo Payload	[RFC2675]	H
0x63	RPL Option	[RFC6553]	H
0x04	Tunnel Encapsulation Limit	[RFC2473]	D
0x05	Router Alert	[RFC2711]	H
0x26	Quick-Start	[RFC4782]	H
0x07	CALIPSO	[RFC5570]	H
0x08	SMF_DPD	[RFC6621]	H
0xC9	Home Address	[RFC6275]	D
0x8A	Endpoint Identification	[nimrod-eid][NIMROD-DOC]	D
0x8B	ILNP Nonce	[RFC6744]	D
0x8C	Line-Identification Option	[RFC6788]	D
0x4D	Deprecated		U
0x6D	MPL Option	[I-D.ietf-roll-trickle-mcast]	H
0xEE	IPv6 DFF Header	[RFC6971]	H
0x1E	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH

0x3E	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH
0x5E	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH
0x7E	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH
0x9E	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH
0xBE	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH
0xDE	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH
0xFE	RFC3692-style Experiment	[RFC4727]	DH

Additionally, the following legend should be added to the registry:

D: Destination Options Header
H: Hop-by-Hop Options Header
U: Unknown

6. Security Considerations

Forwarding nodes that operate as firewalls MUST conform to the requirements in this document. In particular, packets containing standard IPv6 options are only to be discarded as a result of an intentionally configured policy.

These requirements do not affect a firewall’s ability to filter out traffic containing unwanted or suspect IPv6 options, if configured to do so. However, the changes do require firewalls to be capable of permitting any or all IPv6 options, if configured to do so. The default configurations are intended to allow normal use of any standard IPv6 option, avoiding the interoperability issues described in Section 1 and Section 3.

As noted above, the default configuration might discard packets containing experimental IPv6 options.

7. Acknowledgements

This document is heavily based on [RFC7045], authored by Brian Carpenter and Sheng Jiang.

The authors of this document would like to thank (in alphabetical order) Brian Carpenter, Mike Heard, and Jen Linkova, for providing valuable comments on earlier versions of this document.

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