SAML V2.0 Holder-of-Key Assertion Profile

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Abstract:
The SAML V2.0 Holder-of-Key Assertion Profile describes the issuing and processing of holder-of-key SAML assertions. Specifically, we show how a SAML issuer binds X.509 data to a <ds:KeyInfo> element and how a relying party confirms that a <ds:KeyInfo> element matches given X.509 data. The binding material used by the SAML issuer and the matching data used by the relying party are obtained from a standard X.509 v3 certificate.

Status
This document was last revised or approved by the SSTC on the above date. The level of approval is also listed above. Check the current location noted above for possible later revisions of this document. This document is updated periodically on no particular schedule.

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1 Introduction

The SAML V2.0 Holder-of-Key Assertion Profile describes the issuing and processing of a holder-of-key SAML assertion, that is, an assertion containing a <saml:SubjectConfirmation> element whose Method attribute is set to urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:cm:holder-of-key. Specifically, we describe the structural characteristics of a <ds:KeyInfo> element with bound X.509 data and show how a relying party confirms that such a <ds:KeyInfo> element matches given X.509 data. The binding material used by the SAML issuer and the matching data used by the relying party are obtained from a standard X.509 v3 certificate. This profile involves a SAML issuer and a SAML relying party, each with an X.509 v3 certificate in its possession. The SAML issuer uses its certificate to produce a holder-of-key SAML assertion. The relying party consumes the assertion, confirming the subject by comparing the X.509 data in the assertion with the X.509 data in its possession.

1.1 Notation

This specification uses normative text. The keywords "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this specification are to be interpreted as described in [RFC2119]:

...they MUST only be used where it is actually required for interoperation or to limit behavior which has potential for causing harm (e.g., limiting retransmissions)...

These keywords are thus capitalized when used to unambiguously specify requirements over protocol and application features and behavior that affect the interoperability and security of implementations. When these words are not capitalized, they are meant in their natural-language sense.

Listings of XML schemas appear like this.
Example code listings appear like this.

Conventional XML namespace prefixes are used throughout the listings in this specification to stand for their respective namespaces as follows, whether or not a namespace declaration is present in the example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>XML Namespace</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>saml:</td>
<td>urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:assertion</td>
<td>This is the SAML V2.0 assertion namespace defined in the SAML V2.0 core specification [SAML2Core].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ds:</td>
<td><a href="http://www.w3.org/2000/09/xmldsig#">http://www.w3.org/2000/09/xmldsig#</a></td>
<td>This is the XML Signature namespace [XMLSig].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xs:</td>
<td><a href="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema">http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema</a></td>
<td>This is the XML Schema namespace [Schema1].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xsi:</td>
<td><a href="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance">http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance</a></td>
<td>This is the XML Schema namespace for schema-related markup that appears in XML instances [Schema1].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This specification uses the following typographical conventions in text: <SAMLElement>, <ns:ForeignElement>, Attribute, Datatype, OtherCode.
1.2 Normative References


1.3 Non-normative References


1.4 Conformance

1.4.1 SAML V2.0 Holder-of-Key Assertion Profile

Both the SAML issuer and the relying party MUST conform to section 2.3.

A SAML issuer MUST follow the issuing rules in section 2.4. In particular, a SAML issuer MUST produce <ds:KeyInfo> elements that conform to section 2.4.1. Likewise, a relying party MUST follow the processing rules in section 2.5.

To claim conformance to this specification, a SAML issuer implementation MUST support the <ds:X509Certificate> element specified in section 2.4.1. Support for the remaining child elements specified in section 2.4.1 is OPTIONAL for SAML issuers.

Likewise a conforming relying party implementation MUST support the <ds:X509Certificate> element specified in section 2.5. Support for the remaining child elements specified in section 2.5 is OPTIONAL for relying parties.
2  SAML V2.0 Holder-of-Key Assertion Profile

2.1  Required Information

Identification: urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:profiles:holder-of-key

Contact information: security-services-comment@lists.oasis-open.org

SAML Confirmation Method Identifiers: The SAML V2.0 holder-of-key confirmation method identifier (urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:cm:holder-of-key) is associated with every <saml:SubjectConfirmation> element issued under this profile.

Description: Given below.

Updates: Supplements the holder-of-key confirmation method described in section 3.1 of [SAML2Prof].

2.2  Profile Description

Suppose a SAML response issued by a SAML issuer contains one or more holder-of-key assertions (otherwise this specification is not applicable). By definition, a holder-of-key SAML assertion contains a <saml:SubjectConfirmation> element whose Method attribute is set to urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:cm:holder-of-key. This specification describes how the SAML issuer binds selected X.509 data from an X.509 v3 certificate to the <saml:SubjectConfirmation> element of a holder-of-key assertion.

The complementary process involves a relying party that confirms that the X.509 data bound to the assertion matches the data in a given X.509 v3 certificate. We assume that the relying party trusts the SAML issuer to issue holder-of-key assertions. The SAML issuer, on the other hand, may not even know the intended relying party, so there is no underlying assumption that the SAML issuer trusts the relying party.

It is assumed that both the SAML issuer and the relying party each possess an X.509 v3 certificate that is known to be associated with the subject of the assertion. How the X.509 certificate is obtained, however, is completely out of scope.

2.3  X.509 Certificate Usage

There are no explicit requirements with respect to the X.509 certificate(s) possessed by the SAML issuer and the relying party. That said, this specification mandates that the X.509 data bound to the SAML assertion by the SAML issuer and matched against the bound X.509 data by the relying party MUST be taken from an X.509 v3 certificate Error: Reference source not found. The specific characteristics of these certificates, however, are wholly out of scope with respect to this specification. In particular, there is no expectation that either the SAML issuer or the relying party trusts the issuer of the certificate, and therefore all portions of the certificate, apart from the X.509 data specified in the following sections, are unspecified.

The only exception is the case where the <ds:X509Data> element specified in section 2.4.1 contains a <ds:X509SubjectName> element or a <ds:X509SerialIssuer> element. In these two cases, the relying party MUST trust the X.509 issuer in order to confirm the subject. This is discussed more fully in section 2.5 below.

In what follows, we use the term X.509 certificate to refer to an X.509 v3 certificate conforming to Error: Reference source not found.
2.4 Issuing Holder-of-Key Assertions

Every assertion containing a holder-of-key `<saml:SubjectConfirmation>` element MUST conform to [SAML2Core] (see section 2.4.1 of Core, especially section 2.4.1.3) and section 3.1 of [SAML2Prof]. Where this specification conflicts with the SAML V2.0 specification, the former takes precedence.

Suppose a SAML issuer wishes to issue a response containing one or more holder-of-key assertions. As a prerequisite, the SAML issuer MUST possess an X.509 certificate known to be associated with the subject. The SAML issuer binds some or all of the X.509 data in the certificate to the `<saml:SubjectConfirmation>` element of a SAML assertion. The expected content of a holder-of-key `<saml:SubjectConfirmation>` element is specified in the next section.

The SAML issuer binds a `<ds:KeyInfo>` element to a SAML assertion. The `<ds:KeyInfo>` element contains one or more of the following elements: `<ds:X509Certificate>`, `<ds:X509SKI>`, `<ds:X509SubjectName>`, or `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>`. A `<ds:X509Certificate>` element contains a base64 encoding of the certificate possessed by the SAML issuer. A `<ds:X509SKI>` element contains the base64 encoding of the Subject Key Identifier (SKI) extension (if there is one) bound to the certificate. A `<ds:X509SubjectName>` element contains the subject distinguished name (DN) bound to the certificate. A `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element contains the issuer DN and the issuer serial number bound to the certificate. In each case, the content of the `<ds:KeyInfo>` element conforms to the XML Signature specification [XMLSig]. These requirements are spelled out more clearly in the next section.

If the SAML issuer has reason to believe that the relying party trusts the certificate issuer, the SAML issuer MAY include `NotBefore` or `NotOnOrAfter` XML attributes on the `<saml:SubjectConfirmationData>` element. If so, the values bound to the assertion MUST be consistent with the values in the certificate. In particular, the value of the `NotBefore` attribute (resp., the `NotOnOrAfter` attribute) MUST be greater than or equal to (resp., less than or equal to) the `NotBefore` field (resp., the `NotOnOrAfter` field) of the certificate.

Since the `<ds:KeyInfo>` element is extensible [XMLSig], other fields or extensions from the X.509 certificate may be bound to the holder-of-key `<saml:SubjectConfirmation>` element. These are provided as a convenience to the relying party, so that the relying party need not have to decode and parse the certificate. All such extensions are of scope with respect to this profile, however.

2.4.1 KeyInfo Usage

According to the SAML V2.0 specification, a holder-of-key `<saml:SubjectConfirmation>` element MUST contain at least one `<ds:KeyInfo>` element and that the `<ds:KeyInfo>` element conform to the XML Signature specification. The current specification requires that the `<ds:KeyInfo>` element MUST conform to the Second Edition of the XML Signature specification [XMLSig] and further constrains the content of each `<ds:KeyInfo>` element to contain exactly one `<ds:X509Data>` element. The `<ds:X509Data>` element MUST NOT contain a `<ds:X509CRL>` element. Instead, the following content options are specified, at least one of which MUST be satisfied:

- The `<ds:X509Data>` element MAY contain a `<ds:X509Certificate>` element. If it does, the `<ds:X509Certificate>` element MUST contain a base64 encoding of the X.509 certificate possessed by the SAML issuer.
- The `<ds:X509Data>` element MAY contain a `<ds:X509SKI>` element. If it does, the `<ds:X509SKI>` element MUST contain the base64 encoding of the plain (i.e., not DER-encoded) value of the Subject Key Identifier (SKI) extension (as specified in [XMLSig]) of the X.509 certificate possessed by the SAML issuer. If the certificate does not contain an SKI extension, the `<ds:X509Data>` element MUST NOT contain a `<ds:X509SKI>` element.
The `<ds:X509Data>` element MAY contain a `<ds:X509SubjectName>` element. If it does, the `<ds:X509SubjectName>` element MUST contain the subject distinguished name (DN) bound to the X.509 certificate possessed by the SAML issuer.

The `<ds:X509Data>` element MAY contain a `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element. If it does, the `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element MUST contain the issuer DN and the issuer serial number (as specified in [XMLSig]) bound to the X.509 certificate possessed by the SAML issuer.

Use of the `<ds:X509Certificate>` element or the `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element is most restrictive since each implies that the exact same certificate is used by both the SAML issuer and the relying party. Use of the `<ds:X509SKI>` element or the `<ds:X509SubjectName>` element is less restrictive since each permits a different certificate to be used by the relying party provided the certificate contains the same key or DN (resp.) used by the SAML issuer.

Use of the `<ds:X509CertData>` element or the `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element is warranted in those situations where the relying party trusts the issuer of the X.509 certificate. The SAML issuer SHOULD NOT bind either of these elements to the `<ds:X509Data>` element unless it knows such a trust relationship exists.

Note that the format of the DN contained in the `<ds:X509SubjectName>` element or the `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element is specified in [XMLSig]. In accordance with that specification, it is RECOMMENDED that the DN conform to [RFC4514] in all cases.

### 2.4.2 Example

Here is an example of a holder-of-key `<saml:SubjectConfirmation>` element illustrating three of the content options specified in section 2.4:

```xml
<saml:SubjectConfirmation
 xmlns:saml="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:assertion"
 Method="urn:oasis:names:tc:SAML:2.0:cm:holder-of-key">
  <saml:SubjectConfirmationData
    xmlns:xsi="http://www.w3.org/2001/XMLSchema-instance"
    xsi:type="saml:KeyInfoConfirmationDataType">
    <ds:KeyInfo xmlns:ds="http://www.w3.org/2000/09/xmldsig#">
      <ds:X509Data>
        <!-- a base64 encoding of an X.509 certificate -->
        MIIDuDCCAq ACCCJZK8wF0xVjANBgkqhkiG9w0BAQDAQFDBSwg7TAkGCAwEAAGABoQCAGCqI
        BAgTClNvbWUtU3RhGUx5AQBGbNVAcTCNVbWUtQ21oBESHBAnAJUEChMR1hVqAyaMDA4M1w
        EAYDVQQLEw1HU29DIDt1MDQXZAVBGbNVAbMDkpmwYW5hIFRyaW5kYWRlNMSQgVjK2ZIvhcNAQC
        KBFhVzb211LWFkKJH1c3NAg9zdC5vcmcwHhcNMdQgwjEZMTcymQzhDCmdkx8jE2MTcymQDw7jC8
        nTELMAkGAIUEhMCQIxEzARBgNBVAgTC1NvbWUtU3RhGUx5EQAygNBVAcTCNVbWUtQ21oBESHB
        AnAJUEChMR1hVqAyaMDA4M1wEAYDVQQLEw1HU29DIDt1MDQXZAVBGbNVAbMDkpmwYW5hIFRya
        W5kYWRlNMSQgVjK2ZIvhcNAQC KBFhVzb211LWFkKJH1c3NAg9zdC5vcmcwHhcNMdQgwjEZMTcymQzh
        DCmDw7jC8 nTELMAkGAIUEhMCQIxEzARBgNBVAgTC1NvbWUtU3RhGUx5EQAygNBVAcTCNVbWUtQ21
      </ds:X509Certificate>
      <!-- the above X.509 certificate does not contain a Subject Key Identifier extension so the SAML issuer must not include a <ds:X509SKI> element -->
    </ds:X509Data>
  </ds:KeyInfo>
</saml:SubjectConfirmationData>
</saml:SubjectConfirmation>
```
A relying party can confirm the subject by the matching the available X.509 data to any of the above child elements of the <ds:X509Data> element.

### 2.5 Processing Holder-of-Key Assertions

A relying party wishing to confirm the subject of a holder-of-key assertion MUST possess an X.509 certificate known to be associated with the presenter of the assertion. The relying party confirms the subject of the assertion by comparing the X.509 data in the certificate to the X.509 data bound to the assertion. If the X.509 data in the certificate matches the X.509 data bound to the assertion, the subject is said to be confirmed.

Regardless of the protocol used, any assertions relied upon MUST be valid according to the processing rules specified in [SAML2Core]. In particular, the relying party MUST verify the signature (if any) on each assertion containing a holder-of-key <saml:SubjectConfirmation> element. Any assertion that is not valid, or whose subject confirmation requirements cannot be met, SHOULD be discarded and SHOULD NOT be used to establish a security context for the subject.

If the <ds:X509Data> element contains multiple child elements, the relying party may confirm the subject based on any one of them. Specifically, the relying party MUST confirm that the certificate matches the content of the <ds:X509Data> element as follows:

- If the <ds:X509Data> element contains a <ds:X509Certificate> element, and the relying party chooses to confirm the subject based on this element, the relying party MUST ensure that the certificate bound to the assertion matches the X.509 certificate in its possession. Matching is done by comparing the base64-decoded certificates, or the hash values of the base64-decoded certificates, byte-for-byte.

- If the <ds:X509Data> element contains a <ds:X509SKI> element, and the relying party chooses to confirm the subject based on this element, the relying party MUST ensure that the value bound to the assertion matches the Subject Key Identifier (SKI) extension bound to the X.509 certificate. Matching is done by comparing the base64-decoded SKI values byte-for-byte. If the X.509 certificate does not contain an SKI extension, the subject is not confirmed and the relying party SHOULD disregard the assertion.

- If the <ds:X509Data> element contains a <ds:X509SubjectName> element, and the relying party chooses to confirm the subject based on this element, the relying party MUST ensure that the subject distinguished name (DN) bound to the assertion matches the DN bound to the X.509 certificate. If, however, the relying party does not trust the certificate issuer to issue such a DN, the subject is not confirmed and the relying party SHOULD disregard the assertion.
If the `<ds:X509Data>` element contains a `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element, and the relying party chooses to confirm the subject based on this element, the relying party MUST ensure that the issuer DN and issuer serial number bound to the assertion match the issuer DN and the issuer serial number (resp.) bound to the X.509 certificate. If the relying party does not trust the certificate issuer to issue X.509 certificates, however, the subject is not confirmed and the relying party SHOULD disregard the assertion.

In the case of a `<ds:X509Certificate>` element or a `<ds:X509SKI>` element, the matching process is relatively straightforward. If the `<ds:X509Data>` element contains a `<ds:X509SubjectName>` element or a `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element, however, and the relying party chooses to confirm the subject based on one of these elements, the relying party MUST trust the issuer of the X.509 certificate before the subject can be considered confirmed. If such a trust relationship between the relying party and the certificate issuer does not exist, the relying party SHOULD disregard the enclosing assertion.

If the `<saml:SubjectConfirmationData>` element includes `NotBefore` or `NotOnOrAfter` attributes, and the relying party trusts the issuer of the X.509 certificate, the relying party MUST confirm that the current time is greater than or equal to (resp., less than or equal to) the value of the `NotBefore` (resp., the `NotOnOrAfter`) attribute. If this requirement is not met, the subject is not confirmed and the relying party SHOULD disregard the assertion.

### 2.6 Security and Privacy Considerations

This profile assumes that both the SAML issuer and the relying party have access to an X.509 certificate. For those deployments that wish to avoid or do not require an X.509-based public key infrastructure (PKI), this may seem unnecessarily restrictive. In fact, the use of X.509 certificates is typical and provides a number of advantages. First, observe that the SSL/TLS protocol [RFC4346] requires the use of X.509 certificates. Second, and most importantly, since there is no presumption of an underlying trust model for X.509 certificates, the full range of possible content for the `<ds:KeyInfo>` element is avoided. Those deployments that are in fact based on such a trust model, or wish to avoid X.509 certificates altogether, may choose to profile additional child elements such as `<ds:KeyName>` or `<ds:KeyValue>`.

Deployments that rely on holder-of-key SAML assertions will no doubt impose their own requirements on the X.509 certificates used to obtain those assertions. For example, some deployments will require the certificate to be an X.509 end-entity certificate (such as an X.509 proxy certificate [RFC3820]). This specification imposes no such restrictions, however.

### 2.6.1 ASN.1 Encoding

For compatibility with the XML Signature specification [XMLSig], this profile intentionally avoids any discussion of the ASN.1 encoding of the X.509 certificates possessed by the SAML issuer and the relying party. Indeed, in the case of the `<ds:X509Certificate>` element, the ASN.1 encoding of the certificate doesn't matter. In this case, the SAML issuer simply base64-encodes the ASN.1-encoded certificate in its possession and binds it to the `<ds:X509Certificate>` element. Later the relying party base64-decodes the content of the `<ds:X509Certificate>` element and compares the resulting certificate (byte-for-byte) with the ASN.1-encoded certificate in its possession.

In the case of the `<ds:X509SKI>` or `<ds:X509SubjectName>` elements, however, the ASN.1 encoding of the certificates does matter. To produce these elements, the SAML issuer must ASN.1-decode the certificate in its possession and parse the ASN.1 to obtain the X.509 data to be bound to the assertion. Likewise the relying party must ASN.1-decode the certificate in its possession, parsing the ASN.1 to obtain the required X.509 data, which it compares to the X.509 data bound to the assertion.
The problem is that the ASN.1 encoding of an X.509 certificate is not specified. While it is true that an X.509 certificate is often DER-encoded, a robust implementation must be prepared to handle other ASN.1 encodings besides DER, mainly BER and CER. Consequently it is anticipated that deployments will prefer the `<ds:X509Certificate>` element for maximum interoperability. In fact, this preference is reflected in the conformance requirements of this profile (section 1.4).

2.6.2 X.509 Serial Number

Note that some CAs use large random numbers as serial numbers to prevent sequence guessing, but not all XML libraries are capable of dealing with large integers in the `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element. The problem is that the `<ds:X509SerialNumber>` child element of the `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element is typed as an arbitrary integer in [XMLSig] yet conforming implementations are required to support only 18 decimal digits. Thus the `<ds:X509IssuerSerial>` element should be used with care.
Appendix A. Acknowledgments

The editor would like to acknowledge the contributions of the OASIS Security Services Technical Committee, whose voting members at the time of publication were:

- TBD

The editor would also like to acknowledge the following contributors:

- Joana M. F. da Trindade, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)
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- Peter Sylvester, EdelWeb
## Appendix B. Revision History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document ID</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Committer</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sstc-saml2-holder-of-key-draft-01</td>
<td>7 Aug 2008</td>
<td>T. Scavo</td>
<td>Initial draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sstc-saml2-holder-of-key-draft-02</td>
<td>14 Aug 2008</td>
<td>T. Scavo</td>
<td>Remove all refs to <code>samlp:</code></td>
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<tr>
<td>sstc-saml2-holder-of-key-draft-03</td>
<td>7 Sep 2008</td>
<td>T. Scavo</td>
<td>Remove proof of possession requirement</td>
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<tr>
<td>sstc-saml2-holder-of-key-draft-04</td>
<td>6 Oct 2008</td>
<td>T. Scavo</td>
<td>Response to comments</td>
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<tr>
<td>sstc-saml2-holder-of-key-draft-05</td>
<td>20 Oct 2008</td>
<td>T. Scavo</td>
<td>Updated KeyInfo Usage rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>sstc-saml2-holder-of-key-draft-06</td>
<td>13 Nov 2008</td>
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<td>Dropped DER-encoding requirement</td>
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<td>sstc-saml2-holder-of-key-draft-07</td>
<td>7 Dec 2008</td>
<td>T. Scavo</td>
<td>Added NotBefore/NotOnOrAfter attributes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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