

Question and Answer

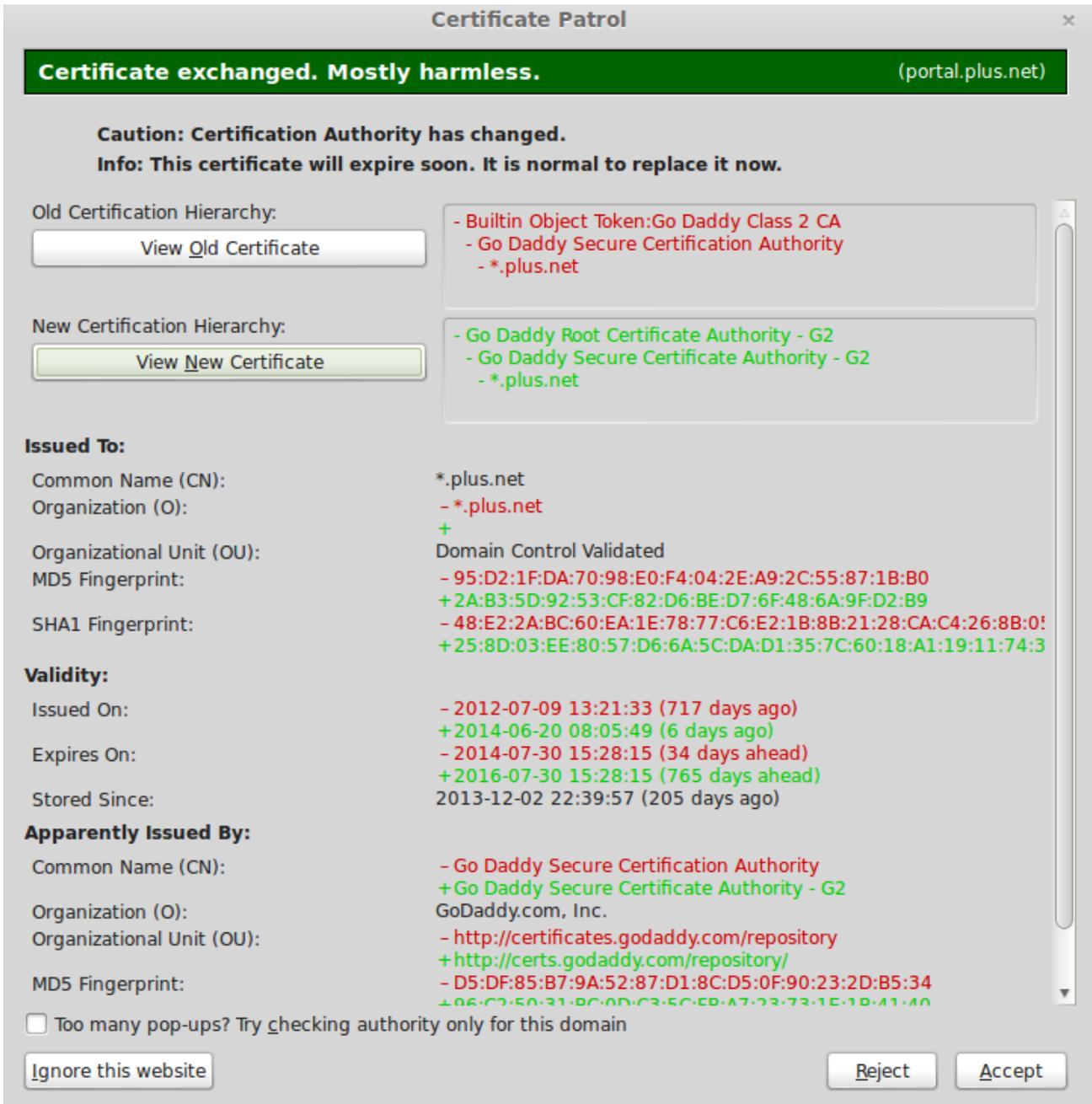
There were several questions this month, each given a section below.

Certificate Patrol Add-on for Firefox

When you visit a secure website, your browser checks that you are visiting the right one by requesting the certificate and then querying a Certificate Agency for the registered certificate. If there is an inconsistency somewhere during this check, the browser will normally fail to approve the connection and give you a statement of the fact.

This add-on does more. It keeps a record of the certificates that you have seen, and will compare the one being checked with the historical record. If they differ, there can be several good reasons why this is the case, but in some cases, this add-on will prompt you with extra information, and ask you to confirm that you are willing to accept the situation.

Some examples were provided by one of our number, as follows.



The above screenshot shows the add-on detecting that a certificate has been changed from the last time it was seen. However, typically all certificates have a fixed lifetime. When they expire, they are considered invalid and not to be trusted, so it normal to replace them shortly before they do expire in order that there be no interruption of service.

The next shot shows a different case:

Certificate Patrol

Certificate exchanged. Suspicious change? (www.cooperativeenergy.coop)

Caution: Certification Authority has changed.
Warning: This certificate wasn't due yet. If this site regularly uses more than one certificate, you may want to activate the 'CA only' option in the details.

Old Certification Hierarchy:

- GlobalSign Root CA
- AlphaSSL CA - G2
- www.cooperativeenergy.coop

New Certification Hierarchy:

- GlobalSign Root CA
- AlphaSSL CA - SHA256 - G2
- www.cooperativeenergy.coop

Issued To:

Common Name (CN):	www.cooperativeenergy.coop
Organization (O):	
Organizational Unit (OU):	Domain Control Validated
MD5 Fingerprint:	- E8:12:5B:D3:7F:72:05:E5:D9:D7:C5:BE:C9:D8:22:1E + D1:69:44:BF:FA:2E:B2:7A:EF:DF:B0:2F:EE:E3:DB:96
SHA1 Fingerprint:	- 69:AB:26:79:4F:7B:69:7D:8A:2B:9E:E1:71:27:06:54:55:24:59:Cf + 40:CA:72:81:32:B1:66:CA:F1:18:94:79:75:FA:52:BF:B6:2C:60:99

Validity:

Issued On:	- 2012-12-10 10:39:06 (563 days ago) + 2014-06-05 15:07:02 (21 days ago)
Expires On:	2014-12-11 10:39:06 (168 days ahead)
Stored Since:	2014-01-02 11:28:57 (175 days ago)

Apparently Issued By:

Common Name (CN):	- AlphaSSL CA - G2 + AlphaSSL CA - SHA256 - G2
Organization (O):	- AlphaSSL + GlobalSign nv-sa
Organizational Unit (OU):	
MD5 Fingerprint:	- 7C:C2:8D:1D:3C:17:71:91:29:CF:55:B2:A5:6F:03:DB + 34:2E:1E:02:D9:18:52:D4:A6:6F:8A:89:21:67:C8:FA

Too many pop-ups? Try checking authority only for this domain

Here we have a case where the certificate authority has been changed, and so it is wise to check that you really trust that this is not suspect. It may well be that for some commercial reason the site has decided to go to a different certificate agency to acquire its next certificate and that there is nothing unusual in that, and this is by far the most likely explanation.

The add-on can give an even stronger warning that should be examined, like this:



In this case the website is being hosted on a different server from its previous place. This may indicate that the site has, for commercial reasons, decided to move its hosting to a different company, and nothing is untoward. However, it may also indicate that someone has usurped the site and re-directed you to a false place. The only real way to find out which is to contact the site and ask – it all depends on whom you trust.

In the worst case (no picture), the certificate will apparently point to a different site altogether, but then the browser will not let you see the site, unless you explicit allow it, as the security information is broken.

Give reasons, etc.

Burning a music CD

For music CDs to be playable on a normal CD player, they must be in the right format, not only for the CD structure, but also the actual format of the files to be loaded onto it. Typically, the only format you should consider is the .wav format that Microsoft has defined.

If you have sound files in some other format, then you can convert them first using something like Audacity which is available in Linux repositories. There is also a version for Windows.

In the Audacity home window, File → Open and find the file you wish to convert. Wait for it to load it. Then File → Export and select the WAV format for the file, select where you want to save it and click Save. Note that .wav format files are often much larger than other sound files you may have, such as mp3's.

When you have them all in the correct format, you can use the Brasero CD burner by selecting the Audio CD button. Then hit the + sign to add files to the CD, and select the .wav files you have prepared. Hit Add to include them into the list of files to burn. You can repeat this step until You have everything collected together.

Important note: I found that Brasero will not allow you to burn from files named by symbolic links – you have to go to the actual file itself to get it. It is unlikely that you will need be aware of that, but I mention it just in case.

Then hit the Burn button, and wait while the CD is burnt. This step could take a long time, depending on the hardware available to the PC.

When is the right time to upgrade a Linux distro?

A Linux distro is the name given to the collection of releases for a particular type of Linux. For example, Ubuntu, LinuxMint, Fedora are all distros. Each distro has its own set of packages that they will keep up to date for a certain time for each release of the distro. The websites for a distro will also contain information about how long they will be supported, and provide links to help you download and obtain the latest versions.

Determining the version of a distro

How do you know what you are running? Most distros have a help feature somewhere in their configuration, but not all have access to it the same way. So if you do not where to start looking, there are some simple text files that should exist for almost every distro. They are all in the directory /etc. You can find this with a file browser from the Computer icon, or usually also from the Home icon, or from some file browser application, by selecting the File System entry in the left hand list of places you can go. This will point you at the root directory of the whole Unix (Linux) file system. One of the directories immediately available will be named 'etc'. Look in there for these files, at least one of which will provide sufficient information:

```
issue
issue.net
os-release
lsb-release
debian-version
```

These are all text files and can be opened in any text editor to view their contents.

There is no similarly easy way of getting to the window manager or desktop in use. The best I've seen so far is to use this command in a terminal window:

```
pstree
```

and then look at the subtree containing Xorg. The processes listed should give an indication of what you have.

How to create a pdf file

From LibreOffice, use File → Export and select the target location in the usual way, as though saving the file. The pdf format was originally designed as a portable printable format that could be used anywhere to give identical results. To this end it was not intended to be editable. Consequently editors tended to treat such a format as one to export the content to, rather than one to be saved and restored from.

How to set the application to be loaded for a filetype

If you wish to change the application that a Linux system uses to access a filetype by a double click in the filesystem browser, then this technique will usually work. It really depends on your distro and the integration between browser and desktop manager, so your details may be slightly different.

From a file of the relevant type, right click and select Open With → Other Application, or some similar wording. After selecting the program you wish to use for this filetype, click the box marked Remember This Application for ..., or something similar, before clicking Open or OK.

References

Certificate Patrol add-on: <http://patrol.psyced.org/>

Audacity home page: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Linux Mint release status and lifetime list: <http://www.linuxmint.com/oldreleases.php>