

# SECURITY ISSUES OF WIRELESS AD HOC SENSOR NETWORKS

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper presents a survey on Wireless Ad Hoc Sensor network security threats, effects and recovery methods. In this we discuss the security issues of Wireless Sensor network and countermeasures by Layers.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Wireless Ad Hoc Sensor Network Security Issues

Wherever WSNs are used for sensitive applications, they should be adequately protected. Network security should provide confidentiality, integrity, authenticity, and data availability (freshness). In respect to security, WSNs differ from most other networks in a number of important ways. First, nodes of a WSN have limited processing capability and memory; therefore, computation-intensive, public-key cryptography is unavailable for their use. Second, the inability to secure the wireless medium (an issue common to all wireless networking devices) leaves WSNs vulnerable to the eavesdropping of traffic, the leaking of data to neighbor networks, the injection of spurious data into the network, and jamming of the network. Third, because of deployment of WSNs is often in unsecured, publicly accessible areas, there exists the possibility of physical tampering and destruction of the devices. Finally, WSN nodes are powered by batteries so power (or energy) conservation is critical. WSN nodes can run at full power for approximately two weeks only. Such an energy-dependent nature imposes threats in the form of resource consumption attacks to WSN security.

In order to discuss WSN security problems in general, some further clarification is necessary. Throughout this section, we will assume that the trust requirements of the WSNs are as follows:

- Base stations (which act as gateways to the outside world) are assumed to be trustworthy and correctly operating.
- Individual sensors inside of nodes are assumed to be trustless since each sensor has the potential to be compromised.
- Each sensor in a node trusts itself.

In order to discuss the issue of WSN security in a structured fashion, we will consider security at each of five layers of TCP/IP Protocol Stack (i.e., Physical Layer, Link Layer, Internet Layer, Transport Layer, and Application Layer) (see Figure 4). Such an approach will help with layer localization of the existing security problems, and consequently, with the creation of a more precise classification of the threats and countermeasures.

Layer 5	Application	Specifies how a particular application uses a network.
Layer 4	Transport	Specifies reliable transport of data.
Layer 3	Internet	Specifies packet format and routing.
Layer 2	Link	Specifies frame organization and transmittal.
Layer 1	Physical	Specifies the basic network hardware.

TABLE 1: TCP/IP Protocol Layers

## PHYSICAL LAYER

The easiest type of attack to perform on the Physical Layer is a jamming attack. [XUW05] In this attack, no knowledge is needed of the WSN that is being attacked, except for the frequency at which the motes are sending. In a jamming attack, the mote that performs the jamming will try to prevent, or interfere with, the reception of signals at the motes in the surrounding WSN. It will do this by sending out a continuous random signal on the frequency that is used by the WSN. Affected motes will not be able to receive messages from other motes and will therefore be completely isolated until the jamming stops.

Jamming attacks can be prevented with frequency hopping, where motes change frequencies in a predetermined sequence and the mote that performs the jamming is ignorant of the specific sequence. [SUNHS07] Frequency hopping in WSN requires extra complexity in terms of processing and calibration it requires. The other way to withstand a jamming attack is to use a radio communication technique that is virtually impossible to jam. Ultra Wide-band (UWB) is based on the transmission of very short pulses in the order of nanoseconds, on a large part of a frequency band simultaneously. [AIELLO3] UWB is well suited for WSN because of its low energy requirements and is therefore a worthwhile jamming countermeasure.

Because WSN motes function unattended, they are vulnerable to the threat of physical tampering or destruction. Such attacks can be prevented or their negative results minimized by hiding or camouflaging the motes or using some type of tamper-proof packaging for motes. [WOODS02]

## LINK LAYER

The Link Layer is most susceptible to the following types of attacks: collision attacks, exhaustion attacks, and denial-of-sleep attacks.

In a collision attack, the attacker uses its radio to listen to the frequency on which a WSN is transmitting. [BROWN05] When it hears the start of a message, it sends out its own signal that interferes with the message. This is called a collision and causes the message to be received incorrectly at the receiver. It is difficult to detect this type of attack because the only evidence of a

collision attack is the reception of incorrect messages. If a frame fails the cyclic redundancy code (CRC) check, the packet is discarded. This attack causes the network to waste its bandwidth and nodes to exhaust their power supplies. The countermeasures that can be applied to collision attacks are the same as those used against jamming attacks. Use of error-correcting codes provides for fair mitigation of collisions.

In an exhaustion attack a malicious node continuously transmits a large number of request-to-send (RTS) packets to generate clear-to-send (CTS) responses from a targeted node. [BROWN05] The targeted node remains awake, waits for the expected forthcoming messages, which never arrive, and eventually exhausts its power source. This attack also leads to multiple collisions of the packets, starvation of other nodes, and a waste of bandwidth. The other nodes also unproductively expend their power resources. The effects of these attacks can be lessened using the rate limiting technique. In this approach, the rate limit cannot drop below the expected maximum data rate the network supports, or the network will ignore all excessive requests. This prevents nodes from extreme power consumption.

Another link-layer threat to WSNs is the denial-of-sleep attack. This attack prevents the node from going into sleep mode. [BROWN05, STAJA99, RAYMO06] At full power, the battery-powered nodes can run for only about two weeks before exhausting their batteries. Most node power consumption happens when a node is transmitting or listening. Therefore, it is crucial that nodes are active (awake) as little as possible (usually at around 1% of the time) and remain in sleep mode for the remainder of the time. An attacker can exhaust a node's resources by repeatedly sending RTS messages triggering CTS responses from a targeted node. In this case, all the nodes within the radio range of the sender will be receiving those (RTS) control packets, thus draining their power supplies. The attacker may also send a constant stream of unauthenticated or replayed broadcast packets causing the nodes to remain awake.

Various contention-based MAC protocols such as Sensor MAC (S-MAC), Berkeley MAC (B-MAC) or Timeout MAC (T-MAC) were designed with the goal of extending the network life cycle by minimizing the number of collisions, idle listening periods, and message overhearing. These protocols synchronize the transmitting activities and sleep of nodes, thus saving battery power. An attacker can also determine which protocol a particular WSN is using by analyzing the network traffic. Using this information, an attacker can gather the information necessary to mount a denial-of-sleep attack. As the way to lessen the effect of these attacks, anti-replay protection, strong link-layer authentication, and broadcast attack protection are proposed. [RAYMO06]

## INTERNET LAYER

At the Internet Layer, attacks target routing protocols. A WSN is a wireless ad-hoc network, thus each sensor node supports a multi-hop routing algorithm where nodes forward packets to the base station.

The most general attacks to sensor network routing are spoofing, replaying, or altering routing-control information. In these attacks the adversary injects bogus routing information into the network. This leads to routing inconsistencies, and, as a consequence increases end-to-end delays

and packet loss in the network. Fortunately, these types of attacks can be effectively prevented using link-layer authentication and anti-replay techniques.

In an Internet Layer selective forwarding attack, a malicious mote joins the routing and makes itself a part of many routes. [KARLO03] The mote then drops all packets or (if it wishes to stay undetected) suppresses or modify packets from a few selected motes while properly forward the remaining traffic.

There are different ways to combat selective forwarding attacks. One of them is to use implicit acknowledgements to ensure that packets are forwarded as they were sent. This technique is considered unattractive for sensor networks because of the extensive consumption of the power by sensor motes' radios. Another way to combat selective forwarding attacks is a multipath routing. [KARLO03, YUGOV01] The same data is sent over multiple paths to give it a higher probability of reaching its destination. This technique is far from satisfactory because it wastes power on redundant paths and consumes additional network bandwidth. Moreover, there might not be so many routing options in particular network.

HELLO flooding is an attack that exploits WSN protocols that require motes to broadcast HELLO packets to announce their presence to their neighbors. [KARLO03] An attacker using a large transmission power can replay a previously recorded HELLO packet and advertise to neighbor motes misleading routing information. Because the network motes' radio range does not allow the motes to communicate with the originating mote, this attack can lead to the inability of legitimate network motes to reliably forward traffic.

Motes can be instructed to authenticate each other by verifying bidirectional links before constructing their routes. This preventative measure can combat HELLO flooding attacks. [SUNK06, KARLO03] Also, geographic routing protocols, which require each mote to know its own location and be able to communicate that location to other motes, can be employed against HELLO flooding attacks. [YUGOV01]

The wormhole attack consists of recording traffic from one region of the network and replaying it in a different region [KARLO03]. Wormholes are very likely to be chosen as routes because they provide a seemingly shorter path to the destination. Thus, an adversary performing this kind of attack supplies the legitimate motes with bogus routing information and lures their traffic into a sinkhole. As a result, the communication between sensor motes and the base station may be disrupted. Wormholes use a private low-latency channel invisible to the rest of a WSN in order to tunnel recorded information. Defense for these attacks may be found in carefully designed routing protocols (e.g., geographic routing protocols). In these specialized protocols, sensor motes interact locally with their neighbors with no involvement from base station thus constructing the ad hoc topology on demand and limiting vulnerabilities. [YUGOV01, KARLO03].

In homing attacks, an adversary may perform network traffic analysis to determine the geographic location of critical motes, such as neighbors of the base station or base station itself. [DENGH05, WOODS02] The attacker can then physically disable these motes (i.e., by jamming). The adversary may even be able to attack the base station thus disabling the entire network. In order to prevent the geographic location of critical motes from being revealed, packet header encryption can be used. Unfortunately, this does not completely prevent traffic analysis since the asymmetry of traffic, when most data flows are directed toward base station, can reveal the location of a base

station. To address this issue, the authors in [DENGH04] suggest that uniform sending rates over the entire network should be used. These can be achieved by dynamically setting the sending rate between motes. "Dummy packets" are sent to equalize the traffic volume. This preventive technique, however, taxes the sensor motes' energy resources, and can be considered useful only when preventing traffic analysis is of supreme importance.

The attack countermeasures at the network layer are highly dependent on authentication; thus, it is worth mentioning the newly proposed lightweight message authentication mechanism in [ZHANG08]. The authors suggest that use of a public key for message authentication may impose too high an overhead in terms of computational cost and network bandwidth consumption. Use of symmetric keys and hash functions is effective, but when the sensor mote is compromised, the keys can become known to the adversary.

Therefore, the authors offer message authentication and verification via polynomials with independent and random factors for the perturbation of polynomial shares preloaded to individual motes. While keeping the computational overhead low, this method increases the complexity of breaking the secret polynomial for an adversary thus making the authentication more resilient to mote compromises.

## TRANSPORT LAYER

If all motes on the WSN are running TCP, attacks become possible at the Transport and Application Layer. At the Transport Layer attacks target the protocols that provide transfer of data between end systems. When explicit connections between identifiable motes are used, either end of the connection maintains some form of connection control block. An attacker can issue a large number of connection setup requests that result in the exhaustion of memory at the end motes. This is called a TCP SYN flood attack.

[WOODS02] Traditional defense against this attack is done using SYN cookies. In order to prevent memory exhaustion, SYN cookies do not store any state on the machine; thus, keeping all state information about the initial TCP connection in the network itself. All this is done with an extensive use of cryptographic functions. It is not clear if this approach will be suitable for WSNs due to its computational and message-size overhead.

[BERNS08] Another kind of Transport Layer attack is the desynchronization attack. [WOODS02] This attack targets the transport protocols that rely on sequence numbers. An attacker issues forged packets with wrong sequence numbers and, as a result, causes retransmissions, which waste both energy and bandwidth. Participants may even end the connection without performing any useful exchange of information. Use of a header or even full packet authentication is good defense measure against such an attack. It is not possible for an adversary to forge authenticated packets, thus the end points of communication can detect and reject malicious packets.

## APPLICATION LAYER

At the Application Layer, an adversary with only minimal effort can launch a severe and effective attack known as the path-based Denial-of-Service (DoS) attack. A DoS attack can disable a large

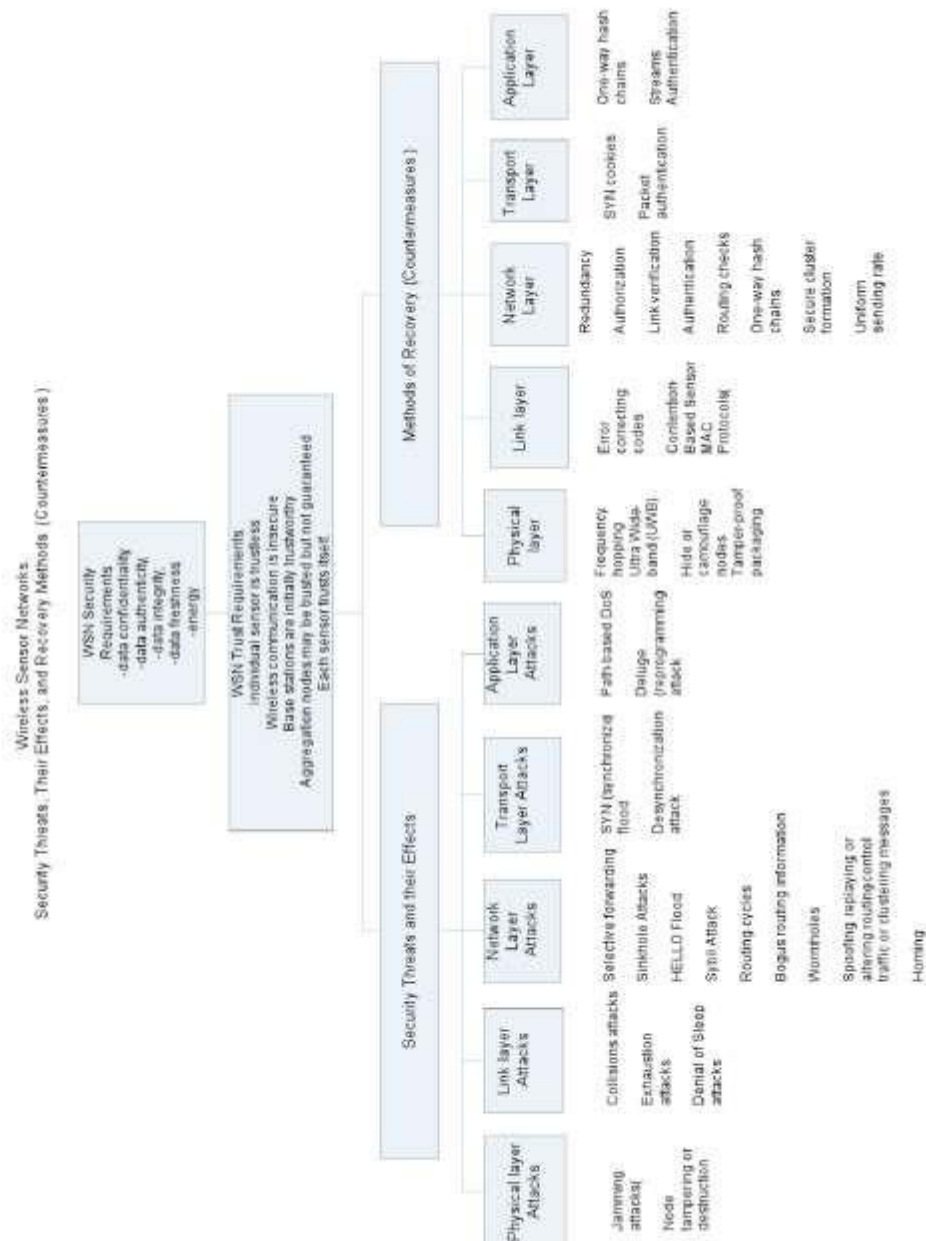


portion of a WSN. [DENGH05] This type of attack is based on the attacker's ability to inject incorrect or replayed packets into the network at leaf nodes. As a result, nodes along the path will exhaust their power supply. Because of the tree structured topology of a WSN, nodes that are located downstream from nodes along the main path will be unable to communicate with the base station.

One proposed countermeasure to the path-based DoS attack is the one-way hash chain (OHC) mechanism. [DENGH05] Using this mechanism, nodes along the path can detect a path-based DoS attack and prevent the propagation of incorrect packets. Each time a node sends a packet, it includes within the packet newly generated one-way hash chain number. When an intermediate node receives the packet, it verifies (against its own maintained verifier) that the OHC number is a new one. If OHC in the received packet is new, the intermediate node forwards the packet; otherwise, it discards this packet. An adversary cannot deduce a valid next OHC number from the current and earlier OHCs.

Thus, this mechanism effectively protects the network from flooding with bogus packets or replayed packets.

The TinyOS proposed for use in WSNs contains the convenient yet vulnerable feature of remote reprogramming of nodes. A Deluge (reprogramming) attack can be waged on the system. An adversary can hijack the reprogramming session, and, as a consequence, gain control over some portion of a network or the entire network. A method for securing of the reprogramming process is offered in [DUTTA06]. The authors underscore the fact that traditional, cryptographically strong, public key-based systems for source authentication and integrity verification cannot be implemented in resource-constrained sensor nodes. They propose instead the idea of dividing program binary into series of messages, each message containing hash of the next message. It becomes impossible for an adversary to construct the message that matches hash contained in previous message. The secure initiation of a legitimate reprogramming process is provided by a digitally signed advertisement, which contains the program name, version number, and hash of the first message.



**FIGURE 4: Wireless Ad Hoc Sensor Network Security Threats, Effects, and Recovery Methods**

TCP/IP Layer	Types of Attacks and Key References	Countermeasures and Key References
<i>Physical</i>	Jamming attacks [XUTRA05]	Frequency hopping [SUNHS07] Ultra Wide-band (UWB) [AIELL03]
	Mote tampering or destruction [WOOD02]	Hide or camouflage motes [WOOD02] Tamper-proof packaging [WOOD02]
<i>Link</i>	Collisions attacks [BROWN05] Exhaustion attack [BROWN05]	Rate limiting [BROWN05]
	Denial of Sleep [BROWN05], [STAJA05], [RAYMO06] Error correcting codes [LIUMA97]	Contention-Based Sensor MAC Protocols [STAJA05]
<i>Internet</i>	Selective forwarding [KARLO05]	Redundancy [NGAIL06], [YUGOV01] Acknowledgements [YUXIA06]
	Sinkhole Attacks [KARLO05]	Authorization [NGAIL06]
	HELLO Flood [KARLO05]	Authentication [SUNPE06] Link verification [Karlo05] Routing checks [KARLO05], [YUGOV01]
	Sybil Attack [KARLO05]	Authentication [ZHANG08]
	Routing cycles [KARLO05]	Link verification [KARLO05] Routing checks [KARLO05], [YUGOV01]
	Bogus routing information [KARLO05]	One-way hash chains [DENGH05]
	Wormholes [KARLO05]	Geographic Routing [YUGOV01] Secure cluster formation [KARLO05]
	Spoofing, replaying, or altering routing-control traffic or clustering messages [KARLO05]	Secure cluster formation [SUNPE06], [KARLO05]
	Homing [WOODS02]	Uniform sending rate [DENGH04]
<i>Transport</i>	SYN (synchronize) flood [WOODS02]	SYN [BERNS08]
	Desynchronization attack [WOODS02]	Packet authentication [WOODS02]
<i>Application</i>	Path-based DoS [DENGH05]	One-way hash chains [DENGH05]
	Deluge (reprogramming) attack [DUTTA06]	Streams Authentication [DUTTA06]

**TABLE 2: Wireless Ad Hoc Sensor Network Security Threats and Countermeasures by Layer**



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many factors contribute to the fact that security in WSNs is significantly more challenging than security in traditional networks. WSNs have inherent resource and computing constraints. WSNs operate on an insecure transmission medium. WSNs are often deployed in unattended, insecure environments. Yet, beyond these security issues there lies great promise for WSNs.

A small but useful group of security applications related to the use of WSNs in the ports currently exists. Specifically, those articles of particular interest fall into the areas of human-made systems: (a) for shipped goods and objects and the transport of such items, and (b) human and property safety issues as they relate to complex systems.

Knowledge of the security vulnerabilities found in WSNs is certainly the first step in overcoming these limitations. The results of this research suggest that there are security vulnerabilities at every layer of the TCP/IP Protocol Stack; yet, it appears that the main reason for this widespread vulnerability is that the protocol layers were designed without considering security requirements and that traditional security solutions (like use of public-key cryptography) cannot be used due to resource constraints. Our study suggests that researchers are now actively addressing these issues. We have found that there exist some solid mechanisms for withstanding routing protocol attacks at the Internet Layer. Also, Link Layer encryption and authentication mechanisms can provide reasonable defenses and can be used for securing the higher protocol layers services.

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