

Common Criteria Activities and Alternative Assurance

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The traditional approach for obtaining assurance in the security features of information systems has involved varying degrees of analysis of the design and testing of the product or system. The recent proliferation of commercial information systems has stressed the necessity to evaluate products in a timely manner. At the same time, the globalization of commercial markets has motivated evaluation authorities to build international standards such as the Common Criteria. These factors have encouraged representatives from the Common Criteria sponsoring organizations in Europe and North America to search for alternative approaches to determining whether information technology (IT) products satisfy security assurance requirements.

Current approaches to gaining assurance about IT products meeting their functional requirements do not respond well to the market demands of developers and users. For commercial levels of assurance which appear to be acceptable by all users of commercially available products, an evaluation that is not completed within a reasonable time frame after product release may not be useful to developers or users due to rapid and competitive changes in the IT marketplace.

The Assurance Approaches Working Group (AAWG), composed of representatives of the Common Criteria sponsoring organizations in Europe and North America, is working on an assurance framework that is mapped to the Common Criteria. The objective of this activity is to investigate

alternative approaches for gaining assurance that IT products and systems meet their security requirements. It includes the definition of alternative assurance approaches to traditional evaluation and the building of alternative assurance packages. This activity seeks to find, in the existing methods of development or methods of validation, alternate requirements to satisfy the assurance objectives expressed in the Common Criteria.

The analysis will initially be performed for Evaluation Assurance Level 3 (EAL 3) of the Common Criteria. Having completed the theoretical analysis, an appraisal method will be defined, and candidates for the first appraisal against this Alternative Assurance method will be identified. This will enable the AAWG to provide guidance to the community regarding alternatives for combining IT security requirements. The final step will be to provide the framework to support alternative assurance approaches.

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