Post Quantum Sphinx

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1 Abstract

This paper introduces two designs of Sphinx[2] variants with corresponding implementations for use in post-quantum threat models with a specific focus on Mix networks. We introduce an obvious variant of Sphinx with $CSIDH^1/CTIDH^2$ and we additionally introduce 'KEM³ Sphinx', an enhanced version of the Sphinx packet format, designed to improve performance through modifications that increase packet header size. Unlike its predecessor, KEM Sphinx addresses performance limitations inherent in the original design, offering a solution that doubles processing speed. Our analysis extends to the adaptation of KEM Sphinx in a post-quantum cryptographic context, showing a transition with minimal performance degradation. The study concludes that the trade-off between increased size and improved speed and security is justifiable, especially in scenarios demanding higher security. These findings suggest KEM Sphinx as a promising direction for efficient, secure communication protocols in an increasingly post-quantum cryptographic landscape.

2 Introduction

In this paper, we enhance the celebrated Sphinx packet format, known for its compactness, with two distinct developments. The first is an upgraded Sphinx parameterization that incorporates post-quantum protections using a hybrid of classical and post-quantum NIKEs, such as X25519 and CTIDH, while preserving the format's original compactness. This approach maintains the efficiency and minimal byte size that made Sphinx notable, now with added post-quantum security. The second development is KEM Sphinx, which, for compelling reasons, chooses to increase the header size. uses a hybrid of classical and post-quantum KEMs to significantly improve performance. This variant acknowledges the trade-off between the original compactness and the need for faster, more robust cryptographic operations. These enhancements provide a pathway to significantly improved security and performance while respecting the core

¹CSIDH: Commutative Supersingular Isogeny Diffie-Hellman

²CTIDH: a faster variant of CSIDH

 $^{^3\}mathrm{KEM}:$ Key Encapsulation Mechanism

values of the Sphinx design, aiming to facilitate wider acceptance and adoption of these improvements.

3 NIKE Sphinx

The Sphinx paper [2] explains a clever group action blinding trick that they use to make the header very compact. Since we are using a NIKE⁴, the Sphinx packet header contains a public key which the next hop uses to compute a DH shared secret with it's private key. It again computes another group action for the blinding trick that computes the public key for the next hop. This let's us avoid having to stuff a bunch of public keys into the Sphinx packet header. Furthermore, with NIKE primitives such as X25519 which are very fast, these two public key operations are only 160233 nanoseconds on my old laptop.

3.1 PQ NIKE Sphinx with hybrid NIKE combiner

The NIKE cryptographic primitive itself can be a hybrid of classical and post quantum (e.g. X25519 and CTIDH⁵), with a simple combiner that appends the two shared secrets together. In the context of Sphinx this works fine since the two shared secrets are inputs to a KDF.

However besides CTIDH there doesn't seem to be any other choices of NIKE primitives that have any defense against sufficiently powerful post quantum adversaries. We'd like to use CTIDH in our hybrid Sphinx implementation but right now CTIDH implementations do not have good performance. And this poor performance is compounded by the NIKE Sphinx design requiring two public key operations.

4 KEM Sphinx Packet Structure

KEM Sphinx is a modification to the original Sphinx packet format where we use a KEM instead of a NIKE. This only requires one public key operation per hop instead of two.

Sphinx Geometry The Sphinx packet geometry is derived from the parameter constants and a few tunable parameters. Each Sphinx packet consists of two parts: the Sphinx Packet Header and the Sphinx Packet Payload. The packet header consists of several components which convey the information necessary to verify packet integrity and correctly process the packet, while the packet payload contains the application message data.

• routing_info_len = per_hop_ri_len * MAX_HOPS

⁴Non-Interactive Key Exchange

 $^{^5\}mathrm{CTIDH}:$ Faster constant-time CSIDH (Commutative Supersingular Isogeny Diffie-Hellman)

- $header_len = kem_element_len + routing_info_len + MAC_LEN$
- $packet_len = header_len + payload_len$

4.1 KEM Sphinx header

The elements of the KEM Sphinx packet are:

- 1. kem_ciphertext KEM ciphertext encrypted to the next hop's public mix key
- 2. route_info A vector of per-hop routing information, encrypted and authenticated in a nested manner. Each element of the vector consists of a series of routing commands, specifying all of the information required to process the packet.
- 3. mac MAC, A message authentication code tag covering α and β .
- 4. payload payload ciphertext

The header format has had two simple changes, the α field is now the KEM ciphertext rather than a NIKE public key (referred to as the group element in the Sphinx paper). And the per hop routing information ciphertext block now contains the KEM ciphertexts for the proceeding routing hops.

4.2 Create a KEM Sphinx Packet Header

Here we cover the KEM Sphinx packet header derivation in these next subsections. The following pseudo code examples are derived from our Sphinx specification document for Katzenpost. [1]

4.2.1 Derive key material for each hop

Here we derive the KEM ciphertext/shared secret and use the KDF to generate the three keys for each hop.

Algorithm 1 Derive key material for each hop 1: $num_hops \leftarrow 3$ \triangleright Let us assume 3 mix nodes. 2: $n \leftarrow 0$ 3: $route_keys \leftarrow []$ 4: $kem_elements \leftarrow []$ 5: while $n \neq num$ -hops do $sharedsecret_n, ciphertext_n \leftarrow ENCAPSULATE(mix_public_key_n)$ 6: 7: $route_keys[n] \leftarrow KDF(sharedsecret_n)$ $kem_elements[n] \leftarrow ciphertext_n$ 8: $n \leftarrow n+1$ 9: 10: end while

4.2.2 Derive keystream and encrypted padding

| Algorithm | 2 | Derive | keystream | and | encrypted | 1 padding |
|-----------|----------|--------|-----------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| | | | | | | |

```
1: ri_keystream \leftarrow []
 2: ri_padding \leftarrow []
3: n \leftarrow 0
 4: while n \neq N do
       ZERO \leftarrow ZERO(routing\_info\_len + per\_hop\_ri\_len)
 5:
       stream \leftarrow StreamCipher(route\_keys[n].header\_encryption)
 6:
       keystream \leftarrow XOR(ZERO, stream)
 7:
       ks\_len \leftarrow LEN(keystream) - ((n+1) * per\_hop\_ri\_len)
 8:
       padding \leftarrow keystream[ks\_len:]
 9:
10:
       if n > 0 then
           prev_pad_len \leftarrow LEN(ri_padding[n])
11:
           paddingB \leftarrow APPEND(ri\_padding[n-1], padding[: prev\_pad\_len])
12:
           padding \leftarrow XOR(padding[: prev_pad_len], paddingB)
13:
14:
       end if
       ri_keystream \leftarrow APPEND(ri_keystream, keystream[: ks_len])
15:
16:
       ri_padding \leftarrow APPEND(ri_padding, padding)
17: end while
```

4.2.3 Create the routing info for the terminal hop

Algorithm 3 Create the routing info for the terminal hop

1: $i \leftarrow num_hops - 1$ 2: $zero_blob \leftarrow ZERO(per_hop_ri_len - LEN(path[i].routing_commands))$ 3: $ri_fragment \leftarrow APPEND(path[i].routing_commands, zero_blob)$ 4: $ri_fragment \leftarrow XOR(ri_fragment, ri_keystream[i])$ 5: $mac_data \leftarrow APPEND(mac_data, ri_fragment)$ 6: $mac_data \leftarrow APPEND(mac_data, ri_padding[i - 1])$ 7: $mac \leftarrow MAC(oute_keys[i].header_mac, mac_data)$ 8: $routing_info \leftarrow ri_fragment$ 9: $if num_hops < MAX_HOPS$ then 10: $pad_len \leftarrow (MAX_HOPS$ then 11: $routing_info \leftarrow APPEND(routing_info, RNG(pad_len)))$ 12: end if

4.2.4 Calculate the routing info for the rest of the hops.

At the conclusion of this step, the following variables will be assigned values:

- routing_info The completed routing_info block.
- $\bullet\,$ mac The MAC for the 0th hop.

Algorithm 4 Calculate the routing info for the rest of the hops.

| 1: $i \leftarrow num_hops - 2$ | |
|--|---|
| 2: for $i \ge 0$ do | |
| 3: $cmds_to_encode \leftarrow []$ | |
| 4: $j \leftarrow 0$ | |
| 5: for $j < LEN(path[i].routing_commands)$ do | |
| 6: $cmd \leftarrow path[i].routing_commands[j]$ | |
| 7: if $cmd.command == next_node_hop$ then | |
| 8: $cmd.MAC \leftarrow mac$ | |
| 9: end if | |
| 10: $cmds_to_encode \leftarrow APPEND(cmds_to_encode, cmd)$ | |
| 11: $j \leftarrow j + 1$ | |
| 12: end for | |
| 13: $ZERO \leftarrow ZERO(per_hop_ri_len - LEN(cmds_to_encode))$ | |
| 14: $ri_fragment \leftarrow APPEND(cmds_to_encode, ZERO)$ | |
| 15: $routing_info \leftarrow APPEND(ri_fragment, routing_info)$ | |
| 16: $routing_info \leftarrow XOR(routing_info, ri_keystream[i])$ | |
| 17: $data_to_mac \leftarrow []$ | |
| 18: $data_to_mac \leftarrow APPEND(data_to_mac, kem_elements[i])$ | |
| 19: $data_to_mac \leftarrow APPEND(data_to_mac, routing_info)$ | |
| 20: if $i > 0$ then | |
| 21: $data_to_mac \leftarrow APPEND(data_to_mac, ri_padding[i-1])$ |] |
| 22: end if | |
| 23: $mac \leftarrow MAC(route_keys[i].header_mac, data_to_mac)$ | |
| 24: $i \leftarrow i - 1$ | |
| 25: end for | |
| 26: return payload | |

4.2.5 Assemble the Sphinx packet header and payload keys vector

The Sphinx packet header is composed of:

- *kem_element*[0] from the above algorithm 1
- routing_info from the above algorithm 3
- mac from the above algorithm 3

Algorithm 5 Assemble the payload keys vector.

```
1: payload_keys \leftarrow []

2: i \leftarrow 0

3: for i < nr_hops do

4: payload_keys \leftarrow APPEND(payload_keys, route_keys[i].payload_encryption)

5: i \leftarrow i + 1

6: end for
```

At the conclusion of the header creation, the Sphinx header along with the vector of SPRP keys are returned to the user.

4.3 Create a Sphinx packet

Here we create the Sphinx Packet Header and SPRP key vector. Prepend the authentication tag, and append padding to the payload. Then we encrypt the payload and append it to the header and return the packet.

Algorithm 6 Create a Sphinx packet.

1: $sphinx_header, payload_keys \leftarrow sphinx_create_header(path)$ 2: $payload \leftarrow APPEND(ZERO(payload_tag_len), payload)$ 3: $payload \leftarrow APPEND(payload, ZERO(payload_len - LEN(payload)))$ 4: $i \leftarrow nr_hops - 1$ 5: for $i \ge 0$ do 6: $payload \leftarrow SPRP_Encrypt(payload_keys[i], payload)$ 7: $i \leftarrow i - 1$ 8: end for 9: return $APPEND(sphinx_header, payload)$

4.4 Unwrapping KEM Sphinx packets

Unwrapping KEM Sphinx packets is roughly twice as fast as the classical NIKE Sphinx because we removed one of the public key operations, we no longer calculate the group element for the next hop by blinding the current group element. Instead we extract the new KEM ciphertext from the encrypted routing information section of the Sphinx packet header.

Below we present a cryptographic circuit diagram of the KEM Sphinx unwrap operation with the following symbols used to signify the four elements of the Sphinx packet:

- α kem_ciphertext
- β route_info
- γ mac
- δ payload

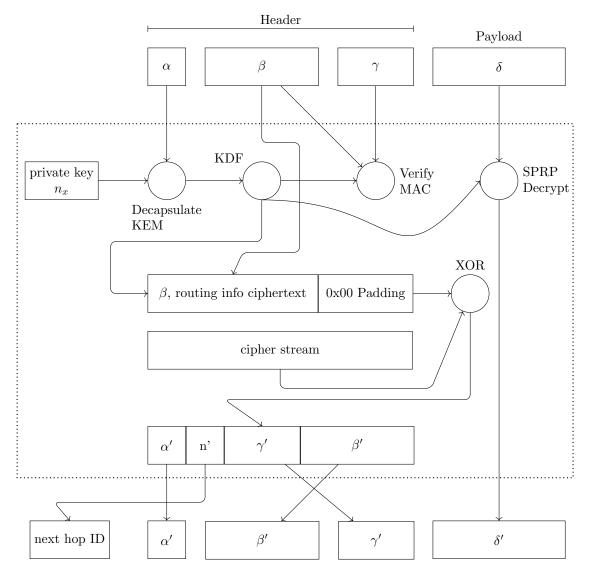


Figure 1: The processing of a KEM Sphinx message $((\alpha, \beta, \gamma), \delta)$ into $((\alpha', \beta', \gamma'), \delta')$ at Mix n.

We refer to this as the "unwrap" operation because it reveals either the plaintext payload or additional layers of encryption. The 'Sphinx_Unwrap' operation handles authentication, decryption and modifying the packet prior to forwarding it to the next node.

 $Sphinx_Unwrap(routing_private_key, sphinx_packet) \rightarrow sphinx_packet, routing_commands, replay_tag, error$

The Sphinx unwrap operation takes two inputs:

- 1. Mix node's private key
- 2. A sphinx packet to unwrap

and produces four outputs:

- 1. 'sphinx_packet' The resulting Sphinx packet.
- 2. 'routing_commands' A vector of RoutingCommand, specifying the post unwrap actions to be taken on the packet.
- 3. 'replay_tag' A tag used to detect whether this packet was processed before.
- 4. 'error' Indicating a unsuccessful unwrap operation if applicable.

The 'Sphinx_Unwrap' operation consists of the following steps:

4.4.1 Calculate the hop's shared secret

| Algorithm 7 calculate the hop's shared secre | et |
|--|----|
|--|----|

hdr ← sphinx_packet.header
 shared_secret ← DECAPSULATE(private_routing_key, hdr.kem_element)

4.4.2 Derive the various keys required for packet processing.

| Algorithm 8 de | erive | various | keys |
|----------------|-------|---------|------|

1: $keys \leftarrow Sphinx_KDF(KDF_INFO, shared_secret)$

4.4.3 Validate the Sphinx Packet Header.

Algorithm 9 validate the Sphinx packet header

1: $to_mac \leftarrow APPEND(hdr.kem_element, hdr.routing_info$

- 2: $derived_mac \leftarrow MAC(keys.header_mac, to_mac))$
- 3: if !CONSTANT_TIME_CMP(derived_mac, hdr.MAC then
- 4: **return** *erorrcode*
- 5: end if

4.4.4 Extract the per-hop routing commands for the current hop.

Append padding to preserve length-invariance, as the routing commands for the current hop will be removed.

| Algorithm 10 | Extract the | per-hop routin | ng commands : | for the current h | op. |
|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----|
|--------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----|

- 1: $padding \leftarrow ZERO(PER_HOP_RI_LENGTH)$
- 2: $B \leftarrow APPEND(hdr.routing_info, padding)$
- 3: $cipher_stream \leftarrow StreamCipher(keys.header_encryption)$
- 4: $B \leftarrow XOR(B, cipher_stream)$ \triangleright Decrypt the entire routing_information block.

4.4.5 Parse the per-hop routing commands.

Algorithm 11 Parse the per-hop routing commands. 1: cmd_buf PER_HOP_RI_LENGTH B[: \leftarrow KEM_CIPHERTEXT_LENGTH] 2: new_kem_ciphertext B[PER_HOP_RI_LENGTH \leftarrow KEM_CIPHERTEXT_LENGTH : PER_HOP_RI_LENGTH] 3: $new_routing_info \leftarrow B[PER_HOP_RI_LENGTH :]$ 4: $next_mix_command_idx \leftarrow -1$ 5: $routing_commands \leftarrow []$ 6: $i \leftarrow 0$ 7: for $i < PER_HOP_RI_LENGTH$ do ▷ WARNING: Bounds checking omitted for brevity 8: 9: $cmd_type \leftarrow B[i]$ $cmd \leftarrow NULL$ 10:switch cmd_type do 11: case NULL 12: \triangleright No further commands. 13:return case next_node_hop 14:RoutingCommand(B[icmd \leftarrow • i + 1 +15:LEN(NextNodeHopCommand)]) \triangleright Save for later. $next_mix_command_idx \leftarrow i$ 16: $i \leftarrow i + 1 + LEN(NextNodeHopCommand)$ 17:case recipient 18:19:cmd \leftarrow RoutingCommand(B[idx: idx + 1 +LEN(FinalDestinationCommand)]) $i \leftarrow i + 1 + LEN(RecipientCommand)$ 20: case surb_reply 21:cmdRoutingCommand(B[ii + 1 +22: \leftarrow : LEN(SURBReplyCommand)])23: $i \leftarrow i + 1 + LEN(SURBReplyCommand)$ $i \leftarrow i + 1$ 24: $routing_commands \leftarrow APPEND(routing_commands, cmd)$ Append 25:cmd to the tail of the list. */26: end for

At the conclusion of the parsing step:

- 'new_kem_ciphertext' The KEM ciphertext for the next hop.
- 'routing_commands' A vector of SphinxRoutingCommand, to be applied at this hop.
- 'new_routing_information' The routing_information block to be sent to the next hop if any.

4.4.6 Decrypt the Sphinx packet payload

| Algorithm 1 | 12 Decrypt | the Sphinx | packet pa | vload |
|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------|
|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------|

```
1: payload \leftarrow sphinx\_packet.payload
```

2: $payload \leftarrow SPRP_Decrypt(key.payload_encryption, payload)$

3: $sphinx_packet.payload \leftarrow payload$

4.4.7 Transform the packet for forwarding to the next mix

Here we transform the packet for forwarding to the next mix, if the routing commands vector included a NextNodeHopCommand.

| Α | lgorithm | 13 | Transform | the | packet | for | forward | ling to | ъt | he next mix | |
|---|----------|----|-----------|-----|--------|-----|---------|---------|----|-------------|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | |

| 1: |
|--|
| 2: if $next_mix_command_idx! = -1$ then |
| 3: $cmd \leftarrow routing_commands[next_mix_command_idx]$ |
| 4: $hdr.kem_element \leftarrow new_kem_ciphertext$ |
| 5: $hdr.routing_information \leftarrow new_routing_info$ |
| 6: $hdr.mac \leftarrow cmd.MAC$ |
| 7: $sphinx_packet.hdr \leftarrow hdr$ |
| 8: end if |

4.5 Sphinx packet post processing

Upon the completion of the 'Sphinx_Unwrap' operation, implementations MUST take several additional steps. As the exact behavior is mostly implementation specific, pseudocode will not be provided for most of the post processing steps.

4.5.1 Apply replay detection to the packet.

Replay detection is accomplished by matching the hash of the shared secret which the node obtains when they DECAPSULATE the KEM ciphertext. We'll refer to this hash value as the replay tag. It must be unique across all packets processed with a given private key.

4.5.2 Act on the routing commands, if any.

The exact specifics of how implementations chose to apply routing commands is deliberately left unspecified, however in general:

• If there is a NextNodeHopCommand, the packet should be forwarded to the next node based on the 'next_hop' field upon completion of the post processing. The lack of a NextNodeHopCommand indicates that the packet is destined for the current node

- If there is a 'SURBReplyCommand', the packet should be treated as a SURBReply destined for the current node, and decrypted accordingly
- If the implementation supports multiple recipients on a single node, the 'RecipientCommand' command should be used to determine the correct recipient for the packet, and the payload delivered as appropriate.

It is possible for both a RecipientCommand and a NextNodeHopCommand to be present simultaneously in the routing commands for a given hop. The behavior when this situation occurs is implementation defined.

4.5.3 Authenticate the packet if required.

If the packet is destined for the current node, the integrity of the payload MUST be authenticated.

The authentication is done as follows:

| Algorithm 14 Authenticate packet | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1: $derived_tag \leftarrow sphinx_packet.payload[: PAYLOAD_TAC$ | G_LENGTH] |
| 2: $expected_tag \leftarrow ZEROS(PAYLOAD_TAG_LENGTH)$ | |
| 3: if !CONSTANT_TIME_CMP(derived_tag, expected_tag) | then |
| 4: | \triangleright Discard packet. |
| 5: end if | |
| | |

Remove the authentication tag before presenting the payload to the application.

Algorithm 15 Remove authentication tag from payload

```
1: \ sphinx\_packet.payload \leftarrow sphinx\_packet.payload[PAYLOAD\_TAG\_LENGTH: \\
```

5 Constructing PQ Hybrid KEMs

Special care must be taken in order correctly compose a hybrid post quantum KEM that is IND-CCA2 robust in the QROM. Most post quantum KEMs are IND-CCA2 however we must specifically take care to make our NIKE to KEM adapter have semantic security and we must make a security preserving KEM combiner.

The KEM Combiners paper [3] makes the observation that if a KEM combiner is not security preserving then the resulting hybrid KEM will not have IND-CCA2 security if one of the composing KEMs does not have IND-CCA2 security. Likewise the paper points out that when using a security preserving KEM combiner, if only one of the composing KEMs has IND-CCA2 security then the resulting hybrid KEM will have IND-CCA2 security.

Our KEM combiner uses the split PRF design from the paper.

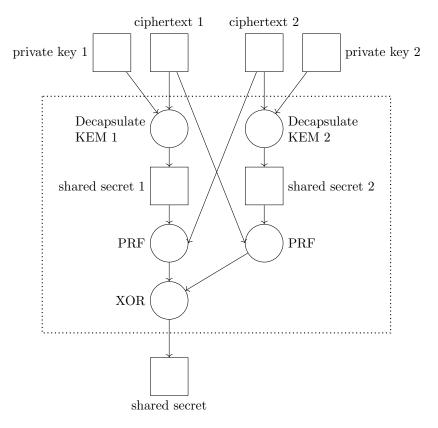


Figure 2: security preserving KEM combiner

Algorithm 16 Split PRF

```
1: function Split_PRF(ss1, ss2, cct1, cct2)
```

```
2: return XOR(PRF(APPEND(ss1, cct2)), PRF(APPEND(ss2, cct1)))
```

```
3: end function
```

If three or more KEMs are combined then the Split PRF is constructed like this:

Algorithm 17 Split PRF

```
1: function SPLIT_PRF(ss1, ss2, ss3, cct1, cct2, cct3)
```

```
2: cct \leftarrow APPEND(cct1, cct2)
```

```
3: cct \leftarrow APPEND(cct, cct3)
```

```
4: ret \leftarrow XOR(PRF(APPEND(ss1, cct)), PRF(APPEND(ss2, cct)))
```

```
5: return XOR(ret, PRF(APPEND(ss3, cct)))
```

```
6: end function
```

5.1 NIKE to KEM Adapter

Our NIKE to KEM adapter is an ad hoc hashed ElGamal construction:

Algorithm 18 ad hoc hashed ElGamal construction

1: **function** ENCAPSULATE(*their_publickey*) $my_privkey, my_pubkey \leftarrow GEN_KEYPAIR(RNG)$ 2: 3: $ss \leftarrow DH(my_privkey, their_pubkey)$ $to_hash \leftarrow APPEND(ss, their_pubkey)$ 4: 5: $ss3 \leftarrow PRF(APPEND(to_hash, my_pubkey))$ $\mathbf{return}\ my_pubkey, ss2$ 6: 7: end function 8: **function** DECAPSULATE(*my_privkey*, *their_publickey*) 9: $s \leftarrow DH(my_privkey, their_publickey)$ $to_hash \leftarrow appned(ss, my_pubkey)$ 10: $shared_key \leftarrow PRF(APPEND(to_hash, their_pubkey))$ 11: **return** shared_key 12:13: end function

6 Security Evaluation

Proof of equivalence to the classical Sphinx goes here.

7 Implementations

7.1 Go implementation

8 Conclusion

KEM Sphinx generates cryptographic objects that are larger in size. However, depending on the specific application, the advantages in performance and security may justify the increased bandwidth overhead.

9 Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Peter Schwabe for encouraging me to look more closely into making KEM Sphinx. Also thanks to Bas Westerbaan and Bertram Poettering for answering my questions about KEM combiners. Thanks to Jacob Appelbaum for editing.

10 Appendix I

All our pseudo code examples contain terms listed here:

- $GEN_KEYPAIR(ikm) \rightarrow privkey, pubkey$ Generate the KEM keypair given the initial key material.
- $ENCAPSULATE(public_key) \rightarrow shared_secret, kem_ciphertext$ Encapsulates to the given public key.
- $DECAPSULATE(my_privkey, kem_ciphertext) \rightarrow shared_secret$ Decapsulates the KEM ciphertext with the given private key.
- ZERO(length_in_bytes) → blob Returns a blob of all zero (0x00) bytes.
- $LEN(byte_slice) \rightarrow length$ Returns the length of the byte slice.
- $KDF(ikm) \rightarrow keys$ Generates three keys:
 - 1. header_mac
 - $2.\ header_encryption$
 - 3. payload_encryption

- $XOR(blobA, blobB) \rightarrow output_blob$ Bitwise XOR operation.
- $APPEND(a, b) \rightarrow c$ Returns b appended to a
- ZERO(byte_slice) Overwrites the given byte slice with ZERO (0x00).
- $RNG(length) \rightarrow blob$ Cryptographically secure random number generator.
- MAC(key, data) → mac
 Produces a MAC value over the given data for the given key.
- $SPRP_Encrypt(key, plaintext) \rightarrow ciphertext$ Wide block cipher encrypt function given the key and plaintext.
- $SPRP_Decrypt(key, ciphertext) \rightarrow plaintext$ Wide block cipher decrypt function given the key and ciphertext.
- $PRF(data) \rightarrow hash$ A cryptographic hash function.
- $DH(private_key, public_key) \rightarrow shared_secret$ Computes a diffichellman shared secret.
- $StreamCipher(key) \rightarrow bit_stream$ Stream cipher.

11 Appendix II

- 11.1 KEM Sphinx Verifpal Proof
- 11.2 KEM Sphinx Proverif Proof
- 11.3 KEM Sphinx Tamarin Proof
- [2]

References

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