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Abstract

This memo introduces a new email header called Expires. Using this header, the sender of an email can state that (s)he believes this message will be irrelevant after the indicated date/time. The receiving MUA can then automatically detect that a message has expired and facilitate handling of such emails for the user.

Conventions used in this document

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in RFC-2119 [i].

The word "client" may in this text designate functionality, which some implementations actually implement wholly or partly in a server.
For example, in the case of IMAP and NNTP, it is very common to
implement functionality, which logically may be regarded as belonging to a client, in the server.

The acronym "MUA" is short for "mail user agent", the software that allows a user to access and manage email.

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1. Introduction

This memo introduces a new header field called "Expires" for Internet email [1] headers, which will enhance the email service. The intention is to let a sender of an email state a date/time until which a message will be relevant. Using this header field, the receiving MUA can then automatically detect that a message has expired and facilitate handling of such emails for the user.

2. Syntax

This section specifies the syntax of the new field using the ABNF rules from [2]. The syntax elements are defined in [1].

Expires-field = "Expires:" CFWS date-time [CFWS] CRLF

3. Semantics

The Expires header indicates a date-time at which this message expires. The exact meaning of "expires" is:

"The sender believes this message will be irrelevant after the indicated date/time."

This header is intended for use between senders and recipients and their agents, rather than by message transport. It is suggested that the default behavior of an MUA with respect to the expires header field should be to display such a message in a distinguished way. For
example, the message could be displayed with gray text rather than black, or in a different font than normal, or (in summaries) with an image of an hourglass with the sand at the bottom.

It is also suggested that MUAs allow setting of an expiration date as an option when composing messages.

The Expires header is strictly advisory in nature: MUAs, Message Stores, and MTAs, MUST NOT delete a message on the basis of an Expired header field unless given explicit instructions to do so by the recipient. Mail Filters MUST NOT consider an expired header field as criteria to be considered for deleting the message unless given explicit instructions to do so by the recipient.

4. Relation to X.400 gateways and Netnews

A similar header to Expires is also defined in recommendations for gatewaying [3] between X.400 [4] and Internet mail as a renamed version of what was previously called "Expiry-Date". However, those recommendations are only valid for gateways. By defining the field here, it is made available for general Internet email usage. It is additionally defined in a similar way in netnews [5].

Note that the definition given in this document imposes a stricter requirement on the field to be advisory than the other definitions: in [3], the meaning of Expiry is specified as the "time at which a message loses its validity", and [5] states that the Expires header field "specifies a date and time when the poster deems the article to be no longer relevant and could usefully be removed". Such automatic removal without explicit instructions from the recipient is strictly forbidden for general Internet mail.

Security Considerations

One intention of "Expires" is to help recipients avoid seeing messages with information which is not any longer valid. There may of course be cases where a user might want to see an expired message (e.g. a user might sometimes want to be informed of a meeting, even after the time of the meeting). This is the reason for the requirement that MUAs MUST NOT delete messages on the basis of the Expires-field unless given explicit instructions to do so by the recipient.
The Expires Header in E-mail

References

[1] Resnick, P. (Editor), "Internet Message Format", Internet-draft
draft-resnick-2822upd-06 (work in progress), February 2008.
EDITORIAL NOTE: TO BE REPLACED WITH RFC 2822 IN CASE OF
PUBLICATION BEFORE THIS I-D IS PUBLISHED.

Specifications: ABNF", RFC 2234, Internet Mail Consortium and
Demon Internet Ltd., November 1997.


Messaging System, ISO international standard 10021-7, ITU
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EDITORIAL NOTE: TO BE REPLACED WITH RFC 1036 IN CASE OF
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Author’s Addresses

Michael Welzl
University of Innsbruck
Technikerstr. 21 A
A-6020 Innsbruck
Austria

Phone: +43 (512) 507-6110
Email: michael.welzl@uibk.ac.at

Thomas Nolf
University of Innsbruck
Technikerstr. 21 A
A-6020 Innsbruck
Austria

Email: thomas.nolf@student.uibk.ac.at

Jacob Palme
Stockholm University / KTH
Skeppargatan 73
S-115 30 Stockholm
Sweden

Email: jpalme@dsv.su.se
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