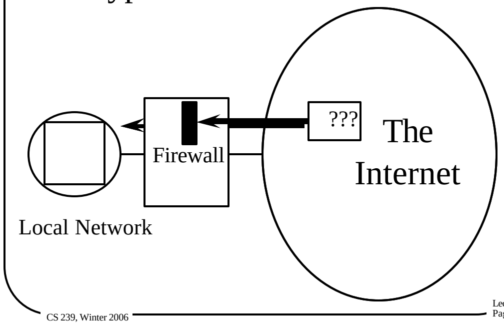
Network Security: Firewalls, VPNs, and Honeypots
CS 239
Computer Security
March 6, 2006

Firewalls

- "A system or combination of systems that enforces a boundary between two or more networks" - NCSA Firewall Functional Summary
- Usually, a computer that keeps the bad guys out

Typical Use of a Firewall



What Is a Firewall, Really?

- Typically a machine that sits between a LAN/WAN and the Internet
- Running special software
- That somehow regulates network traffic between the LAN/WAN and the Internet

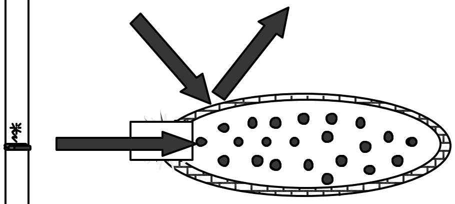
Firewalls and Perimeter Defense

- Firewalls implement a form of security called *perimeter defense*
- Protect the inside of something by defending the outside strongly
  - The firewall machine is often called a *bastion host*
- Control the entry and exit points
- If nothing bad can get in, I'm safe, right?

Weaknesses of Perimeter Defense Models

- Breaching the perimeter compromises all security
- Windows passwords are a form of perimeter defense
  - If you get past the password, you can do anything
- Perimeter defense is part of the solution, not the entire solution

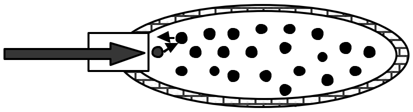
Weaknesses of Perimeter Defense



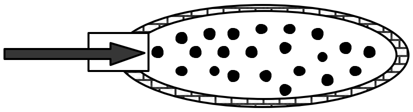
Defense in Depth

- An old principle in warfare
- Don’t rely on a single defensive mechanism or defense at a single point
- Combine different defenses
- Defeating one defense doesn’t defeat your entire plan

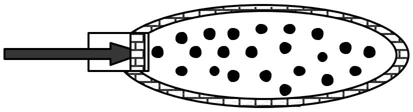
So What Should Happen?



Or, Better

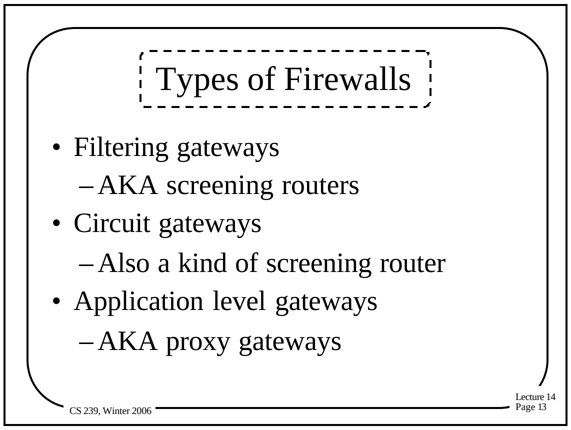


Or, Even Better



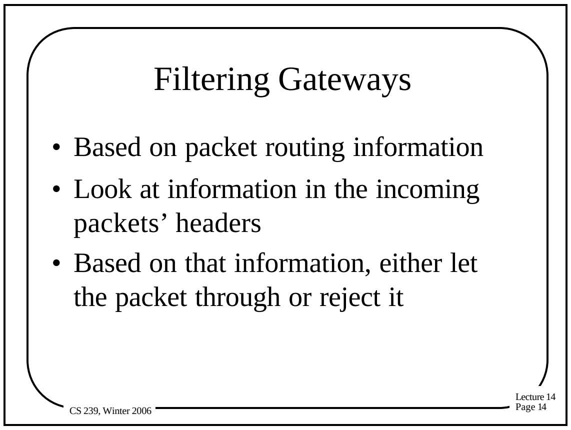
So Are Firewalls Any Use?

- Definitely!
- They aren’t the full solution, but they are absolutely part of it
- Anyone who cares about security needs to run a decent firewall
- They just have to do other stuff, too
- 97% of respondents in 2005 CSI/FBI survey say they use firewalls



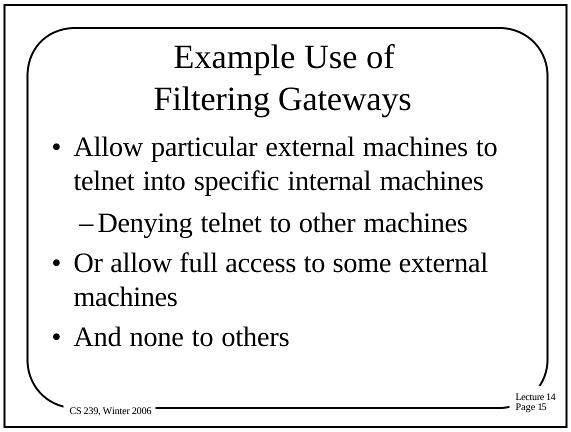
Types of Firewalls

- Filtering gateways
  - AKA screening routers
- Circuit gateways
  - Also a kind of screening router
- Application level gateways
  - AKA proxy gateways



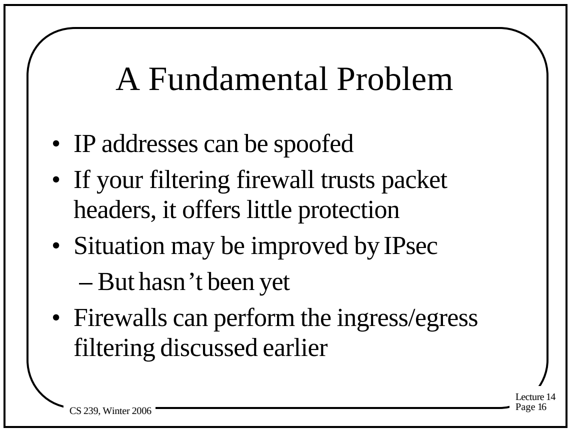
Filtering Gateways

- Based on packet routing information
- Look at information in the incoming packets’ headers
- Based on that information, either let the packet through or reject it



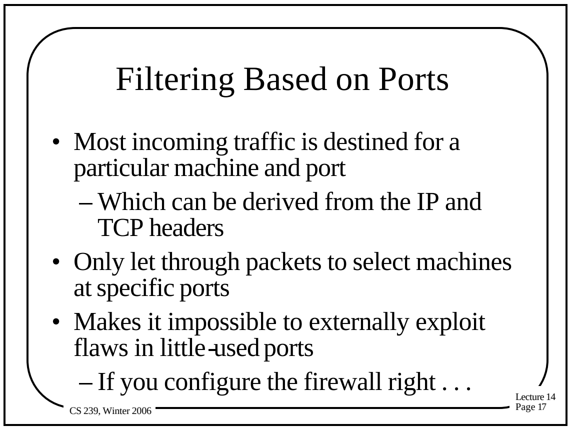
Example Use of Filtering Gateways

- Allow particular external machines to telnet into specific internal machines
  - Denying telnet to other machines
- Or allow full access to some external machines
- And none to others



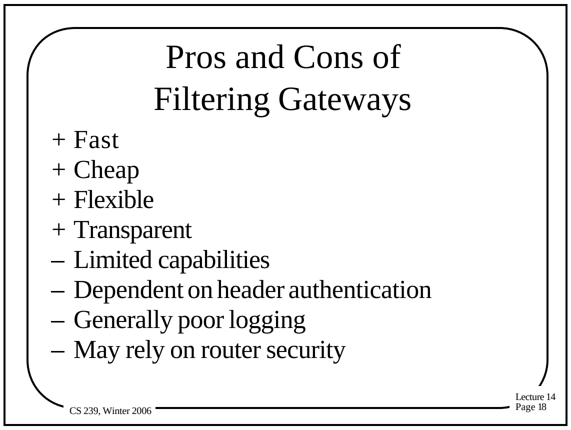
A Fundamental Problem

- IP addresses can be spoofed
- If your filtering firewall trusts packet headers, it offers little protection
- Situation may be improved by IPsec
  - But hasn’t been yet
- Firewalls can perform the ingress/egress filtering discussed earlier



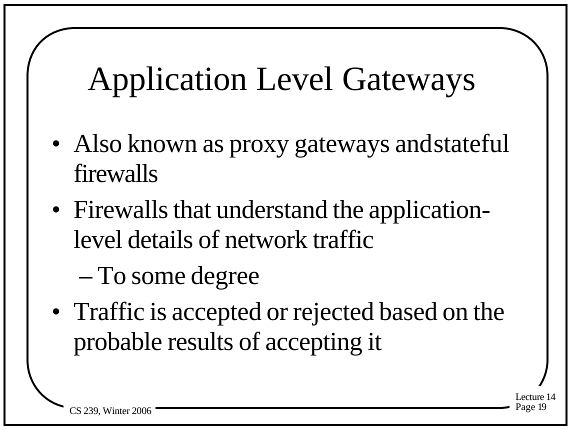
Filtering Based on Ports

- Most incoming traffic is destined for a particular machine and port
  - Which can be derived from the IP and TCP headers
- Only let through packets to select machines at specific ports
- Makes it impossible to externally exploit flaws in little-used ports
  - If you configure the firewall right . . .



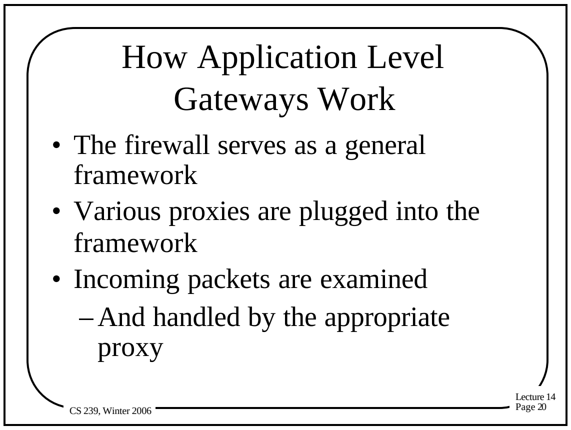
Pros and Cons of Filtering Gateways

+ Fast
+ Cheap
+ Flexible
+ Transparent
– Limited capabilities
– Dependent on header authentication
– Generally poor logging
– May rely on router security



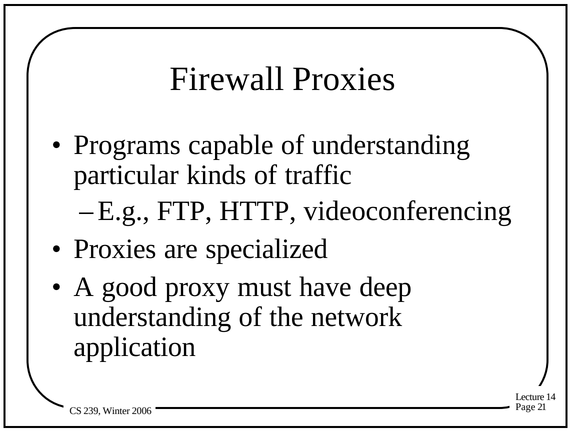
Application Level Gateways

- Also known as proxy gateways andstateful firewalls
- Firewalls that understand the application-level details of network traffic
  - To some degree
- Traffic is accepted or rejected based on the probable results of accepting it



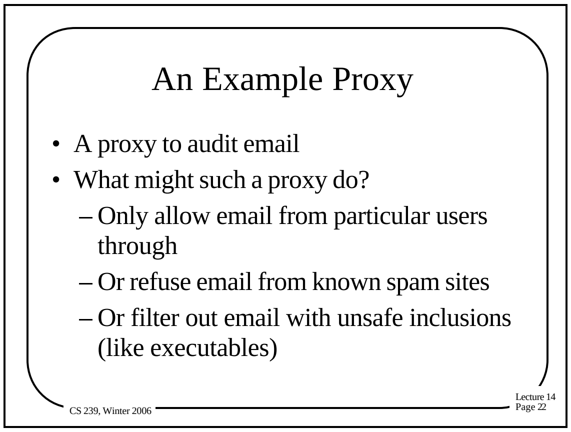
How Application Level Gateways Work

- The firewall serves as a general framework
- Various proxies are plugged into the framework
- Incoming packets are examined
  - And handled by the appropriate proxy



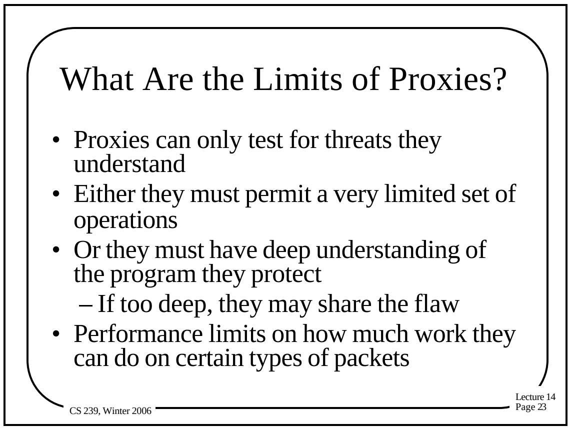
Firewall Proxies

- Programs capable of understanding particular kinds of traffic
  - E.g., FTP, HTTP, videoconferencing
- Proxies are specialized
- A good proxy must have deep understanding of the network application



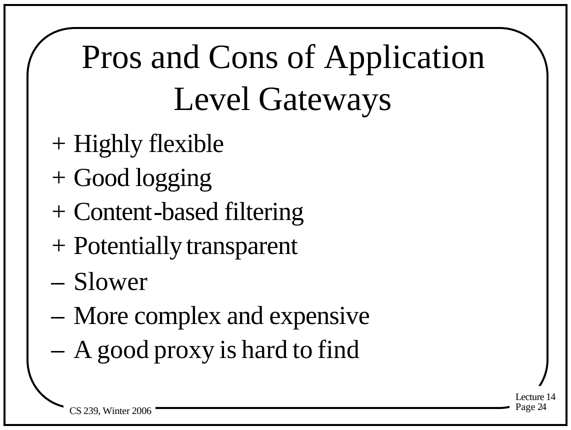
An Example Proxy

- A proxy to audit email
- What might such a proxy do?
  - Only allow email from particular users through
  - Or refuse email from known spam sites
  - Or filter out email with unsafe inclusions (like executables)



What Are the Limits of Proxies?

- Proxies can only test for threats they understand
- Either they must permit a very limited set of operations
- Or they must have deep understanding of the program they protect
  - If too deep, they may share the flaw
- Performance limits on how much work they can do on certain types of packets



Pros and Cons of Application Level Gateways

+ Highly flexible

+ Good logging

+ Content-based filtering

+ Potentially transparent

– Slower

– More complex and expensive

– A good proxy is hard to find

More Firewall Topics

- Statefulness
- Transparency
- Handling authentication
- Handling encryption
- Looking for viruses

Stateful Firewalls

- Much network traffic is connection-oriented
  - E.g., telnet and videoconferencing
- Proper handling of that traffic requires the firewall to maintain state
- But handling information about connections is more complex

Firewalls and Transparency

- Ideally, the firewall should be invisible
  - Except when it vetoes access
- Users inside should be able to communicate outside without knowing about the firewall
- External users should be able to invoke internal services transparently

Firewalls and Authentication

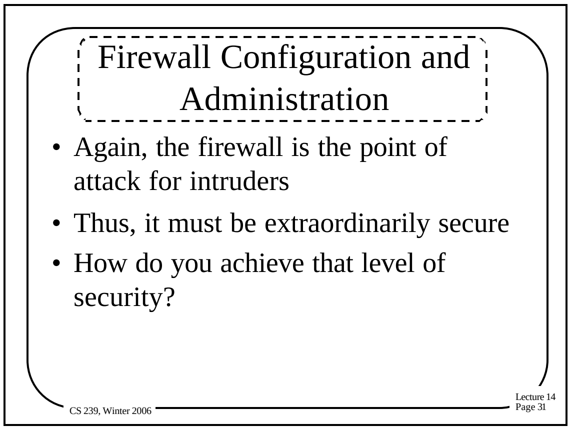
- Many systems want to allow specific sites or users special privileges
- Firewalls can only support that to the extent that strong authentication is available
  - At the granularity required
- For general use, may not be possible
  - In current systems

Firewalls and Encryption

- Firewalls provide no confidentiality
- Unless the data is encrypted
- But if the data is encrypted, the firewall can’t examine it
- So typically the firewall must be able to decrypt
  - Or only work on unencrypted parts of packets
- Can decrypt, analyze, and re-encrypt

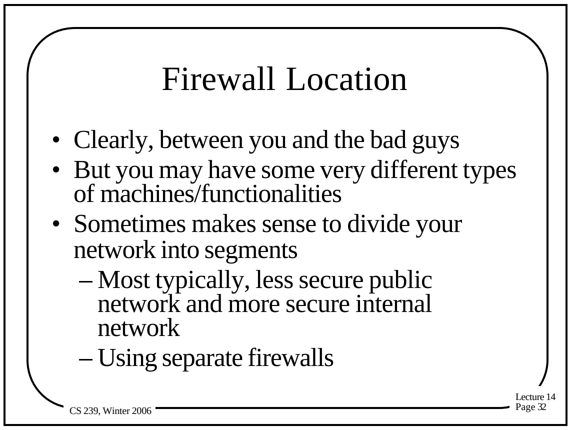
Firewalls and Viruses

- Firewalls are an excellent place to check for viruses
- Virus detection software can be run on incoming executables
- Requires that firewall knows when executables come in
- And must be reasonably fast
- Again, might be issues with encryption



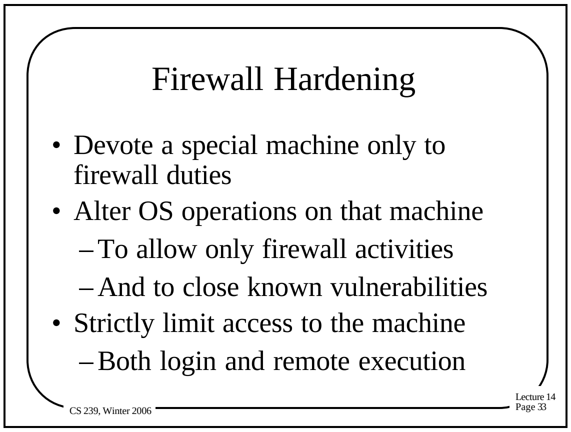
Firewall Configuration and Administration

- Again, the firewall is the point of attack for intruders
- Thus, it must be extraordinarily secure
- How do you achieve that level of security?



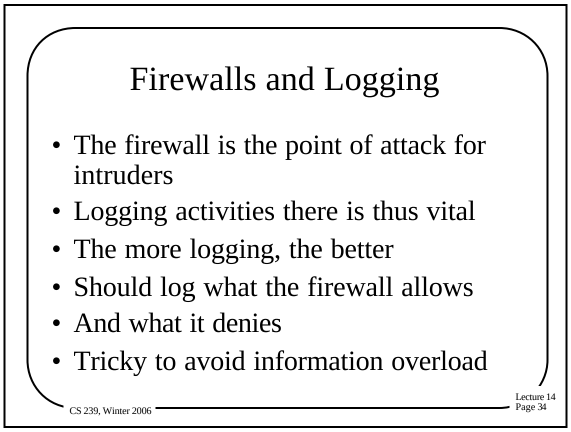
Firewall Location

- Clearly, between you and the bad guys
- But you may have some very different types of machines/functionalities
- Sometimes makes sense to divide your network into segments
  - Most typically, less secure public network and more secure internal network
  - Using separate firewalls



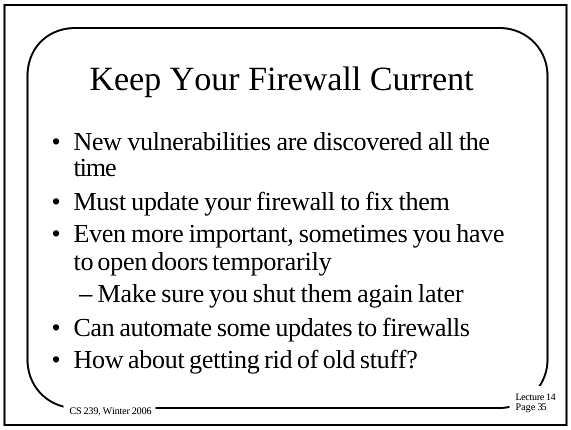
Firewall Hardening

- Devote a special machine only to firewall duties
- Alter OS operations on that machine
  - To allow only firewall activities
  - And to close known vulnerabilities
- Strictly limit access to the machine
  - Both login and remote execution



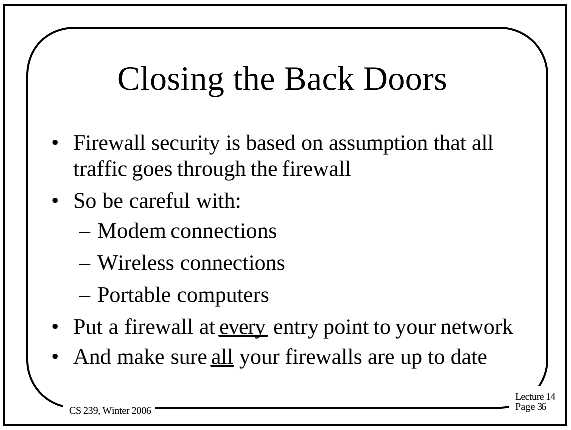
Firewalls and Logging

- The firewall is the point of attack for intruders
- Logging activities there is thus vital
- The more logging, the better
- Should log what the firewall allows
- And what it denies
- Tricky to avoid information overload



Keep Your Firewall Current

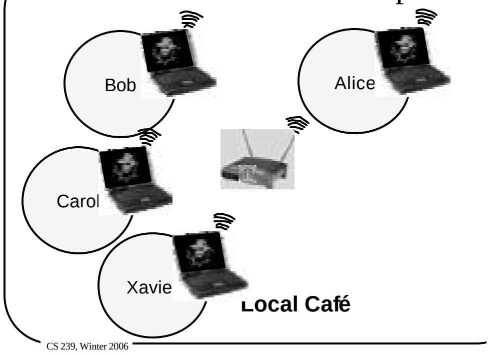
- New vulnerabilities are discovered all the time
- Must update your firewall to fix them
- Even more important, sometimes you have to open doors temporarily
  - Make sure you shut them again later
- Can automate some updates to firewalls
- How about getting rid of old stuff?



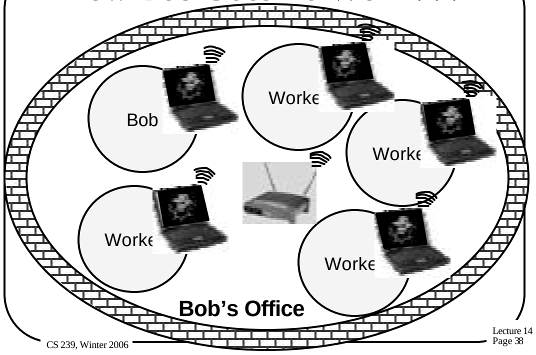
Closing the Back Doors

- Firewall security is based on assumption that all traffic goes through the firewall
- So be careful with:
  - Modem connections
  - Wireless connections
  - Portable computers
- Put a firewall at every entry point to your network
- And make sure all your firewalls are up to date

What About Portable Computers?



Now Bob Goes To Work . . .



How To Handle This Problem?

- Essentially *quarantine* the portable computer until it’s safe
- Don’t permit connection to wireless access point until you’re satisfied that the portable is safe
- UCLA did it first with QED
- Now very common in Cisco, Microsoft, and other companies’ products

How To Tell When It’s Safe?

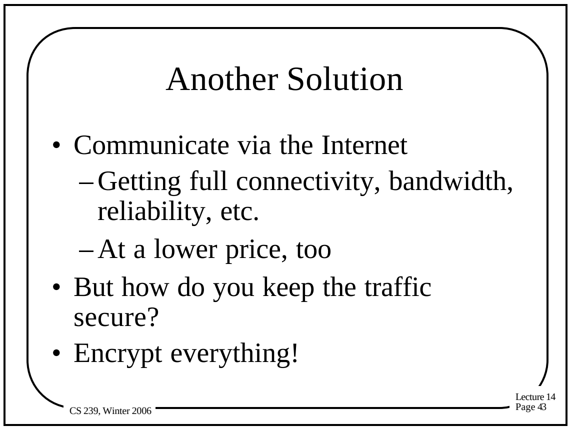
- Local network needs to *examine* the quarantined device
- Looking for evidence of worms, viruses, etc.
- If any are found, require *decontamination* before allowing the portable machine access

Virtual Private Networks

- VPNs
- What if your company has more than one office?
- And they’re far apart?
  - Like on opposite coasts of the US
- How can you have secure cooperation between them?

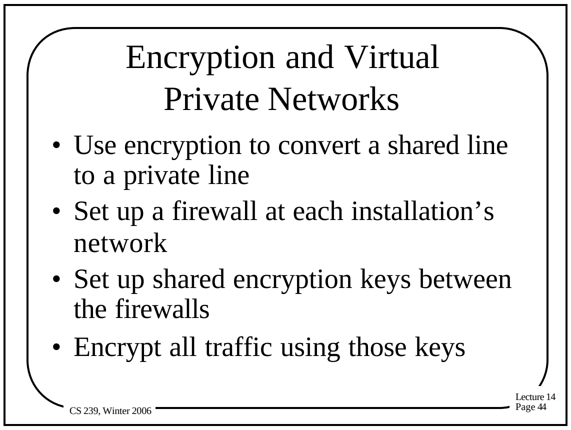
Leased Line Solutions

- Lease private lines from some telephone company
- The phone company ensures that your lines cannot be tapped
  - To the extent you trust in phone company security
- Can be expensive and limiting



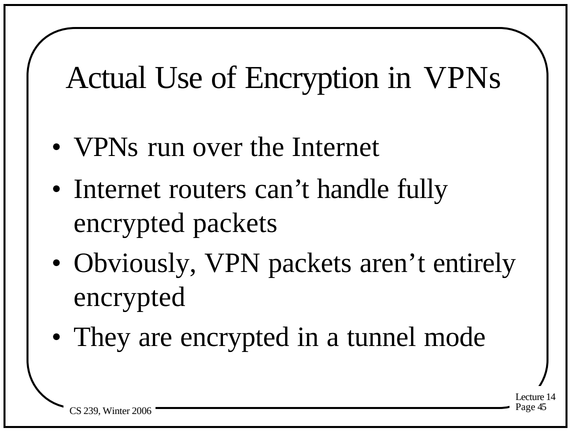
Another Solution

- Communicate via the Internet
  - Getting full connectivity, bandwidth, reliability, etc.
  - At a lower price, too
- But how do you keep the traffic secure?
- Encrypt everything!



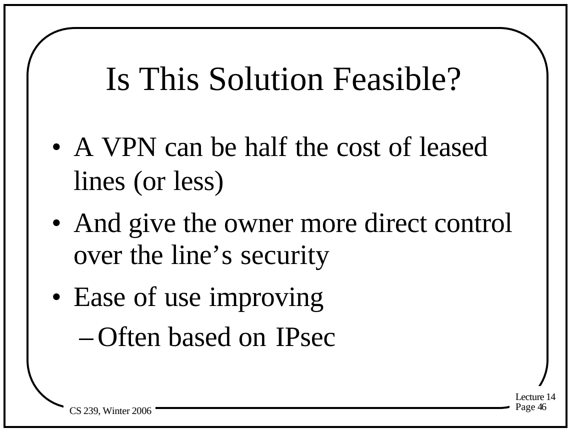
Encryption and Virtual Private Networks

- Use encryption to convert a shared line to a private line
- Set up a firewall at each installation’s network
- Set up shared encryption keys between the firewalls
- Encrypt all traffic using those keys



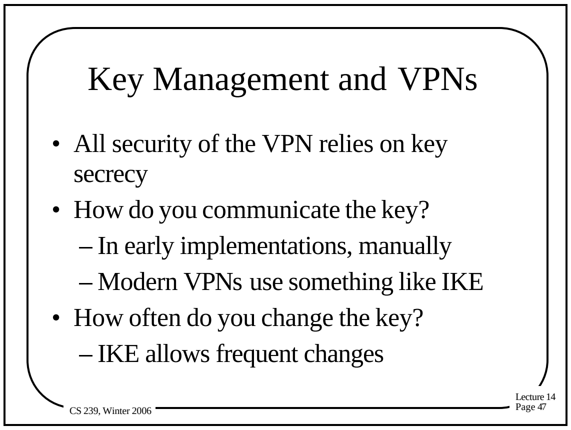
Actual Use of Encryption in VPNs

- VPNs run over the Internet
- Internet routers can’t handle fully encrypted packets
- Obviously, VPN packets aren’t entirely encrypted
- They are encrypted in a tunnel mode



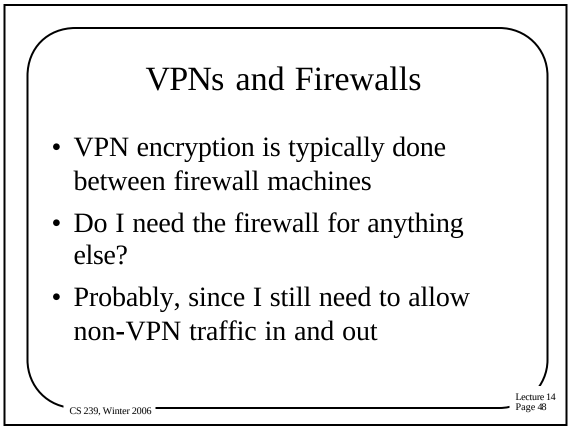
Is This Solution Feasible?

- A VPN can be half the cost of leased lines (or less)
- And give the owner more direct control over the line’s security
- Ease of use improving
  - Often based on IPsec



Key Management and VPNs

- All security of the VPN relies on key secrecy
- How do you communicate the key?
  - In early implementations, manually
  - Modern VPNs use something like IKE
- How often do you change the key?
  - IKE allows frequent changes



VPNs and Firewalls

- VPN encryption is typically done between firewall machines
- Do I need the firewall for anything else?
- Probably, since I still need to allow non-VPN traffic in and out

Honeypots and Honeynets

- A *honeypot* is a machine set up to attract attackers
- Classic use is to learn more about attackers
- Ongoing research on using honeypots as part of a system's defenses

Setting Up A Honeypot

- Usually a machine dedicated to this purpose
- Probably easier to find and compromise than your real machines
- But has lots of software watching what's happening on it
- Providing early warning of attacks

What Have Honeypots Been Used For?

- To study attackers' common practices
- There are lengthy traces of what attackers do when they compromise a honeypot machine
- Not clear these traces actually provided much we didn't already know

Can a Honeypot Contribute to Defense?

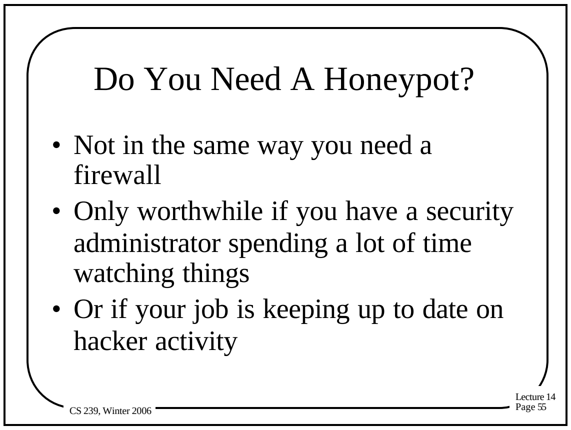
- Perhaps can serve as an early warning system
  - Assuming that attacker hits the honeypot first
  - And that you know it's happened
- If you can detect it's happened there, why not everywhere?

Honeynets

- A collection of honeypots on a single network
  - Maybe on a single machine with multiple addresses
- Typically, no other machines are on the network
- Since whole network is phony, all incoming traffic is probably attack traffic

What Can You Do With Honeynets?

- Similar things to what can be done with honeypots (at network level)
- Also good for tracking the spread of worms
  - Worm code typically knocks on their door repeatedly
- Has given evidence on prevalence of DDoS attacks
  - Through *backscatter*
  - Based on attacker using IP spoofing



Do You Need A Honeypot?

- Not in the same way you need a firewall
- Only worthwhile if you have a security administrator spending a lot of time watching things
- Or if your job is keeping up to date on hacker activity