

CyberRisk Validation Report – Netgate

Product Version: pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router

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# 1. Introduction

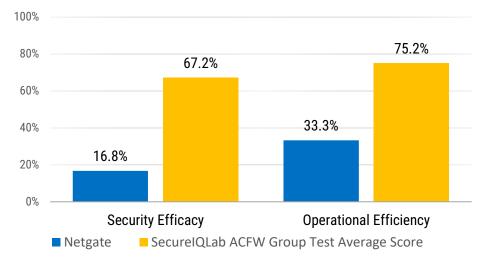


Figure 1. Summary Results for Netgate vs the ACFW Group Test Scores

Advanced Cloud Firewalls (ACFW) protect the infrastructure that organizations depend on. These firewalls serve as a virtual shield. ACFWs use a proactive approach and are designed to simplify security.

SecureIQLab conducted testing for 12<sup>1</sup> leading enterprise-class ACFW solutions. This test was conducted in accordance with the Anti-Malware Testing Standards Organization<sup>2</sup> (AMTSO) test Standard. The maps to version v1.6 of the SecureIQLab Advanced Cloud Firewall CyberRisk Validation Methodology, AMTSO Test ID: AMTSO-LS1-TP070. It is the most comprehensive evaluation of its kind ever performed.

As part of this test, SecureIQLab completed testing Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router. This report discusses the test results for the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router, version 23.05-Release (amd64), and includes validation of the following security modules and components: Stateful packet inspection, GeoIP blocking, Anti-spoofing, Time-based rules, Connection limits, IDS/IPS, Snort-based packet analyzer, Layer 7 Application detection, Multiple rules/sources/categories, Emerging threats database, IP blacklist database, Pre-set rules profiles, Per interface configuration, False-positive alerts suppression, Deep packet inspection, and Application blocking.

This report offers empirical data points on what to expect from the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router, highlighting features and business considerations. SecureIQLab's testing showcases the overall organizational value of the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router in security effectiveness and operational efficiency. Figure 1 highlights Netgate's results in these two areas versus the group test averages.

As Figure 1 shows visually, Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router shows promise and performed below the average ACFW tested.

In writing this report, SecurelQLab has made extensive efforts to guarantee the accuracy of the results while straightforwardly presenting them. However, the test results are necessarily simplified to be presented for review in a summary format.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Testing was attempted on a total of 12 Advanced Cloud Firewall solutions. Please click here for details.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Standards https://www.amtso.org/ conducted testing.

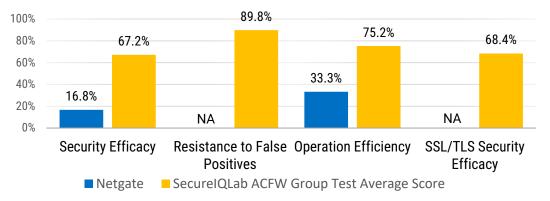
# 2. Report Summary

This 2024 Advanced Cloud Firewall CyberRisk Validation Report provides test results for the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router. Table 1 summarizes the product's overall validation results around security effectiveness, resistance to false positives, operational efficiency, and SSL/TLS security efficacy of the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router solution validated against SecureIQLab ACFW v1.6 methodology.

ACFW Test Categories	Netgate ACFW Score	SecurelQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Security Efficacy	16.8%	67.2%
Resistance to False Positives	Contact SecureIQLab	89.8%
Operational Efficiency	33.3%	75.2%
SSL/TLS Security Efficacy	Contact SecureIQLab	68.4%

Table 1. Netgate ACFW Result Summary

Figure 2 presents the above table in visual format.



#### Figure 2. Overall Result Summary: Netgate ACFW vs SecureIQLab ACFW Group Test Average

Overall Result Summary: While the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router exhibits potential, there is opportunity for enhancements in the primary enterprise categories as represented in the SecureIQLab ACFW validation methodology selection criteria.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> SecureIQLab ACFW v1.6 methodology

# 3. ACFW Test Overview

Advanced Cloud Firewalls (ACFWs) must effectively counter the emergence of advanced attack vectors, novel strategies, and new attack surfaces, thwarting threats that are complex and customized. Beyond merely being aware of application use of the internet, they should possess capabilities to inspect packet content and search for Indicators of Attack (IOA) within the data stream. This test was designed to confirm how well the tested ACFW was able to:

- Identify permitted applications and block prohibited applications.
- Identify and block threats attempting to use "known good" ports and protocols.
- Identify and block threats that attempt evasive tactics, such as non-standard ports or "port hopping."
- Identify and block threats encrypted with SSL/TLS.
- Identify users, groups, and locations, and apply policy regardless of I.P. address.
- Identify and block outbound data leaks.
- Identify and block outbound Botnet Command and Control communications.
- Enable secure business workflow with a high detection rate and low Signal-to-Noise ratio.
- Provide global visibility and granular policy management.
- Provide all necessary alerts and configuration recommendations based on best practices.

SecureIQLab defines prevention as a 24/7 automated response offering without human intervention. This can be achieved through various technologies and mechanisms, including signature-based models, policy-based models, behavior-based models, and machine learning (ML) or artificial intelligence (AI)-based models. This definition is technology-agnostic, focusing on outcomes of the various analyst workflows and scenarios rather than the specific prevention technology. ACFWs, when deployed in a stand-alone mode, are expected to prevent both initial and ongoing attacks while also providing robust reporting capabilities.

The SecureIQLab ACFW v1.6 validation methodology was tailored towards the prevention and reporting capabilities for security and compliance. Configurations typically included multiple security and compliance applications such as Vulnerability Protection, Anti-Spyware, Antivirus, URL Filtering, and DNS Security. By default when configuring, "detect" settings were set to "protect" or "block". SecureIQLab then performed any required tuning according to recommended vendor best practices for operational scenarios involving cloud deployments<sup>4</sup>.

# 3.1 ACFW Deployment Overview

Per SecureIQLab's methodology, all ACFW vendors were requested to configure their products based on best practices that enterprises should implement when deploying the firewall in their organizations. The intent of this testing methodology is to mirror a successful customer experience during the deployment and management of the product.

During the evaluation, SecureIQLab ensured product updates and configuration changes were executed through a central management console: cloud or on-prem device portal. This approach aimed to cover all test scenarios from start to finish to the greatest extent possible.

For a more comprehensive understanding of our testing methods, refer to version 1.6 of the SecurelQLab 2023 <u>ACFW CyberRisk Validation Methodology</u> (AMTSO Test ID: AMTSO-LS1-TP070).

<sup>4</sup> Netgate <u>deployment reference</u>.



### 4. Security Efficacy Results

Advanced Cloud firewalls should be designed to protect cloud-based resources and applications, shielding them from unauthorized access and prevalent cyber threats.

Each ACFW solution evaluated in this test underwent scrutiny across multiple distinct enterprise-centric categories, involving attack vectors of more than 1000 real-world operational scenarios. These scenarios used real world attacks that have targeted small-to-medium size businesses, enterprises, and other organizations. The comprehensive testing performed by SecureIQLab reflects our commitment to innovation and continuous improvement. Moving forward, SecureIQLab plans to continue to augment attack libraries and incorporate additional relevant operational metrics as needed in future iterations of this test.

The Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router was tested against 13 attack types within four primary standard threat categories. Table 2 below presents the results of these tests. Figure 3 below presents an overview of the SecureIQLab findings during the security effectiveness validation and reporting of the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router. This includes the standard threat category score, the advanced threat category score, the operational accuracy score, and the SSL/TLS threat efficacy score from the methodology. These sections of the methodology were selected for presentation because these sections tested each ACFW against the four primary standard threat categories.

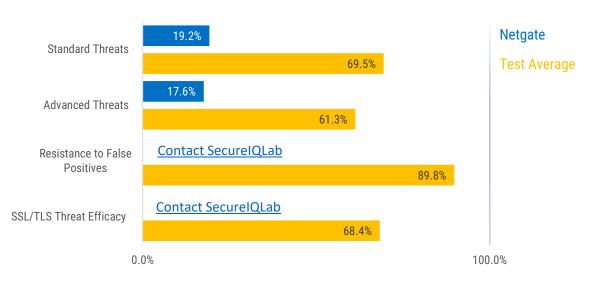


Figure 3. Netgate Advanced Cloud Firewall Security Effectiveness

### 4.1 Common Cloud Firewall Threat Categories (Standard Threats)

The Common Cloud Firewall Threat (Standard Threats) average scores are calculated by averaging the scores for each threat type together within their respective attack category.



Standard Threat Types	Netgate ACFW Inspection Score	SecurelQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Application-Based Threats		
Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks – HTTP		75.5%
Cross-Site Scripting (XSS) Attacks – HTTPS	Contact SecurelQLab	67.1%
Malicious URL Attacks		68.0%
Malware & Botnets		
Malware Download over HTTPS		61.3%
Compressed Malicious Files	Contact SecurelQLab	60.2%
Botnets		58.3%
Browser-Based Threats		
Browser Exploits	Contact SecurelQLab	74.0%
Cookie Stealing - HTTP	100.0%	85.0%
Cookie Stealing - HTTPS	100.0%	100.0%
Browser Version and Plugin-in Control	50.0%	60.0%
Obfuscated JavaScript	Contact SecurelQLab	90.0%
Data-loss and Leakage		
Phishing Site-Based Attacks	Contact SecurelQLab	56.6%
Adware Site Prevention	FAIL	PASS
Standard Threats Average Score	19.2%	69.5%

#### Table 2. Standard Threats Protection Testing

The Netgate ACFW demonstrates superior blocking capabilities compared to the average and scored 100% in both Cookie Stealing HTTP and HTTPS categories.



# 4.2 Advanced Cloud Firewall Threat Categories

Advanced Cloud firewalls must extend their protective capabilities to counter advanced threats, which are often sophisticated, highly evolved, and challenging to detect or neutralize. Such threats may employ various tactics and techniques to circumvent traditional security measures. As a pivotal component of any organization's cybersecurity infrastructure, a robust cloud firewall should possess threat detection capabilities, be able to identify suspicious network traffic patterns and have the capacity to block in real time.

The Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router was tested against eight attack types classified as advanced threats. Table 3 below provides the results from these tests.

Advanced Threat Classification	Netgate ACFW Inspection Score	SecurelQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Advanced Evasive Techniques (Application-based)	99.7%	79.6%
Advanced Evasive Techniques (Network-based)		75.0%
Known Malicious Files	Contact SecureIQLab	60.2%
Malicious Documents		59.3%
Active Cloud-Based Threats (aka Active Threats)	41.2%	46.5%
Advanced Persistent Threats (APT)		65.0%
Cloud-Centric Post Exploitation Techniques (Post-Exploitation – DNS Tunnelling)	Contact SecurelQLab	45.0%
Cloud-Centric Post Exploitation Techniques (Post-Exploitation – ICMP Tunnelling)		60.0%
Advanced Threats Average Score	17.6%	61.3%

#### Table 3. Advanced (Non-Standard) Threat Protection Testing

The Advanced Cloud Firewall Threat average scores are calculated by averaging the scores for each threat type together within their respective attack category. Netgate performed well above the average and scored 99.7% In the Advanced Evasive Technique (Application-based) category.

### 4.3 Operational Accuracy Category

False positive testing was included in the scope of this test because an Advanced Cloud Firewall that prevents 100% of malicious attacks but also prevents legitimate (non-malicious) actions can be vastly



disruptive. SecureIQLab used appropriate tools and techniques to ensure that the tested firewall products do not generate significant numbers of alerts with legitimate applications and processes in an enterprise environment. This section of the methodology was performed at the same time as and as part of the validation workflow and other independent sections wherever feasible. The aim is to ensure that the firewall products did not prevent malicious traffic at the expense of operational accuracy.

The Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router was tested for operational accuracy under real-world scenarios during the entire test cycle, and Table 4 below provides the results from these tests.

Operational Accuracy test	Netgate ACFW Score	SecurelQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Resistance to False Positive Test	Contact SecurelQLab	89.8%

Table 4. Operational Accuracy

Contact SecureIQLab regarding the assessment of Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router in this test.

# 4.4 ACFW SSL/TLS Support

Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and its secure analogue HTTPS have long been crucial internet protocols. HTTPS uses encryption to enhance browsing safety by establishing secure connections between browsers, applications, and websites. To identify the attacks or threats in encrypted connections, the firewall must inspect the encrypted traffic using SSL/TLS ciphers and the associated techniques for managing encrypted connections. To detect a threat concealed within encrypted data, the firewall must decrypt packets, inspect the content, and take necessary action.

For each ACFW tested, SecureIQLab tested 22 of the TLS v1.2 ciphers and 3 TLS v1.3 ciphers. The testing included combinations of ciphers between clients and servers to analyze firewall behavior with weak ciphers, to assess how the firewall behaved to communication using different ciphers, and to evaluate the ACFW's ability to fall back or enforce secure ciphers during communication.

The Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router was tested for overall SSL/TLS threat efficacy and its ability to protect against attacks delivered through the supported ciphers in real-world scenarios. Please contact SecureIQLab regarding the Netgate ACFW performance during the SSL/TLS test. Table 5 below presents the results of these tests.

SSL/TLS Threat Efficacy Test	Netgate ACFW Overall Metric	SecurelQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Overall SSL/TLS Security Efficacy	Contact SecurelQLab	68.4%

Table 5. SSL/TLS Threat Efficacy

The cipher suites for TLS v1.2, as highlighted in Table 6 below, were tested for the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router.



TLSv1.2 Ciphers	TLS Support	TLS Handshake Result	Attack Traffic Prevention within TLS Session	Operational Validation with Operational TLS Traffic
AES128-GCM-SHA256				
AES128-SHA				
AES256-GCM-SHA384				
AES256-SHA				
AES256-SHA256				
DHE-RSA-AES128-SHA				
DHE-RSA-AES256-SHA				
DHE-RSA-AES256-SHA256				
DHE-RSA-CHACHA20-POLY1305				
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES128-GCM-SHA256				
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES128-SHA		Cont	test SecuralOI sh	
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES128-SHA256		<u>com</u>	tact SecurelQLab	
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES256-GCM-SHA384				
ECDHE-ECDSA-AES256-SHA384				
ECDHE-ECDSA-CHACHA20-POLY1305				
ECDHE-RSA-AES128-GCM-SHA256				
ECDHE-RSA-AES128-SHA				
ECDHE-RSA-AES128-SHA256				
ECDHE-RSA-AES256-GCM-SHA384				
ECDHE-RSA-AES256-SHA				
ECDHE-RSA-AES256-SHA384				
ECDHE-RSA-CHACHA20-POLY1305				

Table 6. TLS v1.2 Cipher Support

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Contact SecureIQLab regarding Netgate TLS v1.2 ciphers support.

The cipher suites for TLS v1.3, as highlighted in Table 7 below, were tested for the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router.

TLSv1.3 Ciphers	TLS Support	TLS Handshake Result	Attack Traffic Prevention within TLS Session	Operational Validation with Operational TLS Traffic
AES256-GCM-SHA384	Contact SecurelQLab			
CHACHA20-POLY1305-SHA256				
AES128-GCM-SHA256				

Table 7. TLS v1.3 Cipher Support

Contact SecurelQLab regarding Netgate TLS v1.3 ciphers support.

# 5. Security Resiliency Results

Security products must demonstrate overall resiliency, as failure to do so can have significant consequences. The Department of Defense (DoD) defines security resilience as "The ability of systems to resist, absorb, and recover from or adapt to an adverse occurrence during operation that may cause harm, destruction, or loss of ability to perform mission-related functions."

SecureIQLab has adopted a novel approach to define the firewall resiliency metrics. Our security resiliency rating combines security efficacy with key operational and cloud-based performance metrics based on a real-world scenario. This holistic approach considers the firewall's security efficacy (threat protection) and operational efficiency metrics mapped to crucial capabilities and ACFW workflows relevant to enterprise use cases subjected to real-world traffic.

The security resiliency test used a simulated real-world cloud-based traffic mix. The traffic mix was based on internet use by eight specific industry verticals: Enterprise, Small-to-Medium Businesses (SMB), Remote Office Branch Office (ROBO), Healthcare and Educational organizations, Media and Entertainment, and Financial and Retail organizations. As outlined in v1.6 of the SecurelQLab Advanced Cloud Firewall CyberRisk Validation Methodology, the primary objective of the security resiliency-based test is NOT to push the cloud security solution under test to its maximum limits but to ensure it remains operationally and functionally viable up to at least at 50% of its throughput.

The ability of the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router to pass each stage of the security resiliency test was based on the following criteria:

- **PASS** = Security resiliency protection rate (%) must be ≥ 95% against all attacks under load.
- **PASS** = Overall solution throughput (%) must be ≥ 95% (at steady state) of the maximum tested ACFW cloud throughput numbers.



• **PASS** = Overall application traffic success rate (%) must be ≥ 95% of all real-world application traffic validated against a specific cloud-based scenario.

The Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router was tested for security resiliency under real-world scenarios during the entire test cycle, and Table 8 below provides the results from these tests.

Real World Cloud-based Traffic Scenario Mix	Security Resiliency Protection Rating	Overall Solution Throughput	Overall Application Traffic Success Rate	
Media and Entertainment Companies				
Healthcare Organization				
Financial Institution	Contact SecureIQLab			
Enterprise				
Small-to-Medium Business (SMB)				
Educational Institution				
Retail Companies				
Remote office Branch Office (ROBO)				
	Table O. Casurity Desili			

Table 8. Security Resiliency

Contact SecureIQLab regarding the Netgate ACFW Security Resiliency tests.

# 6. Operational Efficiency Results

ACFW operational efficiency measures the tested ACFW's operating burden and complexity of setup and use. As such, the Operational Efficiency Score measures both the ability of the ACFW to detect and respond to cyber-attacks appropriately and ease of use. The operational efficiency was evaluated by considering factors such as:

- The ease of tuning the ACFW security policy and configuration (pre-and-post deployment).
- The solution's incident response and management intuitiveness from a policy and security configuration perspective.
- Compliance check.
- Risk assessment and mitigation capabilities.
- Enhanced security metrics reporting capabilities.
- The ease of managing and controlling assets and business continuity with appropriate configuration and policy backup (with restoration).

In the analysis, the Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router was rated high, medium, or low across 12 operational efficiency categories, as identified in Table 8 below. For more details on each of the categories, please <u>contact SecureIQLab</u>.



The Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router was tested for operational efficiency, considering realworld enterprise procurement, deployment, and active scenarios throughout the test life cycle. Table 9 below presents operational efficiency score of 33.3%.

Operational Efficiency	Netgate ACFW Score	SecurelQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
<b>Overall Operational Efficiency Score</b>	33.3%	75.2%

#### Table 9. Overall Operational Efficiency Score

Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router solution achieved 33.3% score in the operational efficiency tests as highlighted in Table 10 below.

ACFW Operational Efficiency Metrics	Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router	SecurelQLab ACFW Group Test Average Score
Security Policy Configuration	Low	Med
Security Policy Management	Med	High
Asset Management	Low	High
Access Control	Low	High
Compliance Management	Low	High
Business Continuity Management	Low	Med
<b>Risk Assessment &amp; Mitigation</b>	Low	Med
Security Metrics Reporting	Low	High
Backup & Restore	Low	Med
Analytics	Low	Med
Customer Support	Low	Med
License Management	Med	High

Table 10: Operational Efficiency Results.

Table 10 shows that the Netgate ACFW has potential for improvement across operational efficiency categories tested.



# 7. Key ACFW Solution Differentiators - Vendor Perspective

Netgate offers the following reasons for why customers choose their pfSense firewall:

Netgate's pfSense firewall is a highly versatile, open-source security solution known for its adaptability and robust feature set. Designed to meet the needs of a wide range of deployments from small home offices to large enterprise environments, pfSense combines ease of use with comprehensive security features.

**Open Source and Cost-Effective.** Netgate's pfSense is open-source, allowing for unparalleled transparency and trustworthiness in its security features. This aspect also makes it a cost-effective solution compared to proprietary firewalls, with no licensing fees for core features. Its community-driven development ensures rapid updates and a wide range of free plugins.

**Highly Customizable.** The platform's flexibility stands out, offering customizable options that can cater to specific network requirements. Users can configure pfSense for various roles, including firewall, VPN gateway, router, and wireless access point, making it a versatile choice for any network architecture.

**Strong Security Features.** The firewall includes an impressive array of security features such as stateful packet inspection (SPI), proxy support, and traffic shaping, alongside powerful VPN options like IPsec and OpenVPN. These capabilities ensure that it can secure network perimeters effectively and provide secure remote access solutions.

**Easy to Use Interface.** Intuitive web-based interface that simplifies complex network configurations. This accessibility helps users to efficiently manage their networks, apply security policies, and monitor network activity in real-time.

**Rich Community and Support**. With a large and active community, users have access to extensive documentation, forums, and support channels. For businesses requiring additional assurance, Netgate offers professional support and consulting services, ensuring that users can maximize their firewall's potential.

Customers choose Netgate's pfSense firewall for its blend of flexibility, powerful security features, and the value proposition of an open-source platform. Whether for securing a small home network or protecting enterprise-level infrastructure, pfSense provides a reliable, scalable, and adaptable solution, making it a popular choice among users looking for comprehensive network protection



### 8. Conclusion

The Netgate pfSense Plus Firewall/VPN/Router includes validation of the following security modules and components: Stateful packet inspection, GeoIP blocking, Anti-spoofing, Time-based rules, Connection limits, IDS/IPS, Snort-based packet analyzer, Layer 7 Application detection, Multiple rules/sources/categories, Emerging threats database, IP blacklist database, Pre-set rules profiles, Per interface configuration, False-positive alerts suppression, Deep packet inspection, and Application blocking demonstrates potential capabilities of ACFW. Preventing both Cookie Stealing HTTP and HTTPS threat type attacks were done exceptional well with 100.0% scores.

# 9. Contact Information

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For more information about SecurelQLab and the testing methodologies, please visit our website.

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