



# Travelers Cyber Risk Bulletin

## Windows 7 End of Life Alert



Still driving the car you bought 20 years ago? How about the jacket that was all the rage “back in the day”? Most products follow a life-cycle similar to living organisms – introduction, growth, maturity, and decline. Whether it is a car, clothing, or technology, all things eventually become obsolete, lose effectiveness, or just plain wear out. Two of the world’s most popular computer systems are on the verge of reaching that milestone – Microsoft Windows 7<sup>1</sup> and Windows Server 2008/R2<sup>2</sup>. Support for these two operating systems will end on January 14, 2020.

“End of support (EOS)”, also known as “End of Life (EOL)” means that while the operating system will continue to function, the manufacturer, Microsoft in this case, *will no longer provide technical support, software updates, security updates or patches.*

Not surprisingly, a large number of systems still run both Windows 7 and Server 2008. In fact according to [ComputerWorld](#), Windows 7 is still running on 27.8% of all Windows PC’s. This poses a problem for security. So many unpatched computers are an enticing target for attackers, and vulnerabilities in Windows 7 and Server 2008 have been targeted before. The WannaCry attacks exploited a vulnerability (*for which a patch had been available*) in [Windows 7](#) and Server 2008 that infected more than 230,000 computer systems across 150 countries costing over \$4 billion in losses – *in one day*.

While the easy answer may be to “just upgrade” to a supported operating system, the decision for if/how to upgrade comes down to applying appropriate due diligence. For example, some considerations could include:

- Will the device and/or application that is running on Windows 7 or Server 2008 still run on the newer operating system version?
- If that system is proprietary, would upgrading void warranties?
- Many Windows 7 systems support manufacturing or healthcare devices that would incur costs far beyond that of a “simple” upgrade as the machines themselves might need replacement or upgrade.
- Decisions for when and how to upgrade devices supporting medical functions obviously require extra diligence.

<sup>1</sup>Windows 7 is a personal computer operating system that was produced by Microsoft as part of the Windows NT family of operating systems. It became generally available on October 22, 2009.

<sup>2</sup>Windows Server 2008 and 2008 R2 is a server operating system produced by Microsoft. It became generally available on February 27, 2008.



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If you can't upgrade or replace with a supported operating system, consider compensating controls you can apply such as:

- Purchase **extended security updates** for *Windows 7 Professional/Enterprise* and *Server 2008*.
- Run Windows 7 virtually on a computer with a supported operating system.
- Put Windows 7 devices on their own virtual network (vLAN) and lock down traffic to the minimal necessary, or fully isolate.
- Run Server 2008 in a virtual/cloud environment

Risk informed decisions to address an enterprise-wide project such as upgrading legacy systems ought not to be taken lightly and would ideally involve collaboration from across the enterprise including Senior Management, Business Units, Risk, IT, and Security.

With the accelerating pace of technological advancement and capabilities of our adversaries, we must always be ready to support and defend our businesses and livelihoods. One way to be ready is to stay informed. There are several resources to help with that:

- Get on mailing lists to be notified of updates and threats
  - Manufacturer mailing lists such as [Microsoft Content Upgrade Subscriptions](#)
  - US-CERT: <https://www.us-cert.gov> is a great source of IT and security info, the mailing lists are excellent.
  - The National Council of ISACs (Information Sharing and Analysis Centers): delivers IT, threat and mitigation information focused by industry segment. <https://www.nationalisacs.org/>
- And information on the Travelers website:
  - <https://www.travelers.com/resources/cyber-security>
  - <https://www.travelers.com/cyber-insurance>

For more information about this EOL event, Microsoft has a FAQ site for Windows 7 EOL at: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/4527873/itpro-faq-about-end-of-support-for-windows-7> and for Server 2008 EOL at: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/4456235/end-of-support-for-windows-server-2008-and-windows-server-2008-r2>.

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