NW3C
Cyber Threat
Advisory and Analysis Series

Dangerous Software Issue

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Background

Microsoft announced that the life cycle of Windows XP and Office 2003 will end on April 8, 2014. Microsoft will no longer provide updates or patches, including critical security updates. This means that cyber attackers will have the upper hand in compromising legacy operating systems and software. If you continue to use Windows XP beyond April 8, 2014, there is a likelihood of suffering a cyber attack.

How do we know new exploits will be released soon after April 8, 2014? Attackers closely examine Windows updates as they are released and develop exploits which are based on these updates. These exploits take advantage of computers that have not been updated. Microsoft regularly releases security-related patches to fix weaknesses on what is known as "Patch Tuesday," which occurs on the second Tuesday of each month. Attackers will look at all subsequent patches and see if the vulnerability exists on other operating systems.

What may happen to your Windows XP computer after support ends on April 8, 2014? Your computer will still work and you can continue to use it; however, you are at an increased risk for attacks which could compromise the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of your computer system and data that is contained therein.

Microsoft announced on January 15, 2014, they would be extending anti-malware detection updates past the support expiration until July 14, 2015, for those who cannot upgrade before the deadline. This extension does not extend critical operating system updates; however, the computer may still be vulnerable to attack. This announcement still warns of the need to update to a fully supported operating system. Outlined below are some steps to get you started on migrating to safer software.

Microsoft has already expired support for older Windows versions such as Windows 95, 98, Millennium edition, and Windows 2000. Computers running operating systems this old may not be capable of running an updated version of Windows as the hardware may be insufficient. In the reference section below, there are links for minimum system requirements for currently supported operating systems, Windows 7 and 8.

For Windows Vista, the mainstream support expired on April 10, 2012. To receive extended support updates through April 11, 2017, install Service Pack 2 through Windows updates. You may need to ask your IT department about performing Windows updates to the latest service pack for your operating system and/or Microsoft Office.

What to do now

1. Determine if you are running at-risk software.
    a. To determine if you are running Windows XP, reboot your computer and watch for the following startup screen. If it appears like the image below, you are running Windows XP.
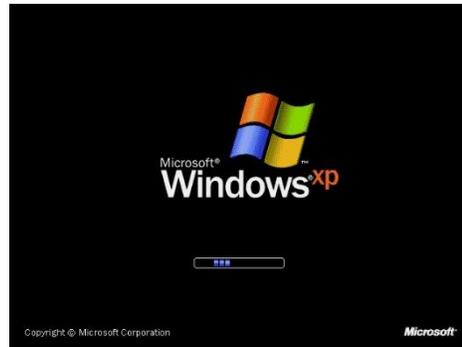
    b. To determine if you are running Office 2003, open Microsoft Word and click the Help menu option. Select "About Microsoft Word," Office 2003 will be displayed.
2. Plan to migrate to a newer version of Windows. Determine what version will best work for your agency, and purchase enough licenses for the computers that will be upgraded.
3. Before moving to a new operating system, determine if your third-party software and hardware will work correctly on the new operating system. Microsoft has an application compatibility tool which will catalog all software and hardware and report on known compatibility issues. There may be new versions of software you use that work on the new operating system.
4. The new operating system will have to be a fresh installation. There is no way to perform an "upgrade" from Windows XP to Windows 7 or Windows 8.1.
5. Back up all files and all software installation media to a separate partition or media.
6. Have available all software licensing information as your software (if compatible) will need to be reinstalled on the new operating system.
7. Plan to migrate to the new operating system when impact of downtime will be minimal.
8. Install the new operating system from installation media.
9. Install all necessary software and hardware.
10. Perform all Windows updates to be sure to be protected from the latest threats.

Resources: Where to get help

What version of Windows am I running?
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/which-operating-system

Windows Lifecycle fact sheet
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/lifecycle

What does it mean if my version of Windows is no longer supported?
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/help/what-does-end-of-support-mean

Microsoft Windows XP and Microsoft Office 2003 support ends
http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/enterprise/endofsupport.aspx

The Countdown Begins for Windows XP support
http://blogs.technet.com/b/security/archive/2013/04/09/the-countdown-begins-support-for-windows-xp-ends-on-april-8-2014.aspx

The Risk of running XP after support ends
http://blogs.technet.com/b/security/archive/2013/08/15/the-risk-of-running-windows-xp-after-support-ends.aspx

Determine what version of Microsoft Office you are using
http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel-help/what-version-of-office-am-i-using-HA101873769.aspx?CTT=5&origin=HA103306332

Windows for Government
http://www.microsoft.com/government/en-us/products/Pages/windows-7.aspx

How to buy Windows for State and Local Government
http://www.microsoft.com/government/en-us/how_to_buy/Pages/SLG.aspx

Install Windows using a USB drive (Recommended)
http://www.microsoftstore.com/store/msusa/html/pbPage.Help_Win7_usbdvd_dwnTool

Video: Removing the shackles of legacy (old) software
http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/hh771454.aspx

Microsoft Assessment and Planning toolkit
http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/confirmation.aspx?id=7826

What is a Zero-Day attack?
http://www.pctools.com/security-news/zero-day-vulnerability/

Windows XP will have a Zero-Day vulnerability attack vector forever!
http://www.pcworld.com/article/2046839/zero-day-forever-move-away-from-windows-xp-now.html

Windows 7 System requirements
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows7/products/system-requirements

Windows 8.1 System requirements
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-8/system-requirements

What is 32bit or 64bit Windows?
http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/32-bit-and-64-bit-windows#1TC=windows-7

Free software to see if your CPU is 64bit capable
http://www.cpuid.com/softwares/cpu-z.html

Microsoft antimalware support for Windows XP
http://blogs.technet.com/b/mmpc/archive/2014/01/15/microsoft-antimalware-support-for-windows-xp.aspx