EASY2PATCH | White Paper 2026

The Windows 10 Endgame

Third-party application risk in the final ESU window — what changes on 13 October 2026, what it costs to delay, and why the application layer is the part most migration plans leave uncovered.

— Executive Summary

Windows 10 reached end of support on 14 October 2025. The consumer Extended Security Updates bridge expires on 13 October 2026, and Windows 10 Enterprise LTSB 2016 reaches end of extended support on the same date. Commercial ESU can be extended annually to October 2028, but pricing doubles each year and enrolment is cumulative — an organisation that skips Year 1 and enrols in Year 2 must purchase both.

Most migration plans account for the operating system. Fewer account for what happens to the third-party applications running on the devices that stay behind. That is the gap this paper addresses: the residual estate, its application layer, and how to keep it patched and evidenced while the migration completes.

The core finding: ESU covers the operating system only. Every browser, reader, runtime and line-of-business application on an ESU device remains your responsibility, on a platform Microsoft is no longer investing in — and those applications are where exploitation concentrates.

What The Dates Actually Mean

Date	Event	Practical Effect
14 Oct 2025	Windows 10 End Of Support	Routine Quality And Security Updates Stop For Non-Enrolled Devices
13 Oct 2026	Consumer ESU Year 1 Ends	Consumer Bridge Closes Entirely
13 Oct 2026	Windows 10 Enterprise / IoT LTSB 2016 End Of Extended Support	Version 1607 Estates Lose Free Servicing
14 Oct 2026	Commercial ESU Year 2 Begins	Per-Device Price Doubles; Year 1 Purchase Required Retroactively If Skipped
12 Oct 2027	Commercial ESU Year 3 Begins	Price Doubles Again
12 Oct 2028	Commercial ESU Ends	No Further Servicing At Any Price

Windows 10 Servicing Timeline. Verify Against Microsoft Lifecycle For Your Specific SKU Before Planning.

$61
Commercial ESU Year 1, Per Device

$122
Year 2, Per Device — Cumulative Enrolment Required

$244
Year 3, Per Device

$427
Full Three-Year Cost Per Device If Carried To The End

The cumulative enrolment rule is the detail that catches organisations. ESU licences are not à la carte by year. An organisation that decides in Year 2 that it needs coverage must purchase Year 1 retroactively as well. Delaying the decision does not defer the cost; it increases it.

Who Stays On Windows 10, And Why

Devices that remain on Windows 10 past the deadline are rarely there through neglect. They are there because something specific blocks migration:

- Hardware ineligibility. TPM 2.0, Secure Boot and CPU generation requirements exclude a portion of otherwise serviceable machines.
- Application compatibility. Line-of-business software with no validated Windows 11 build, often from vendors that have themselves gone quiet.
- Attached equipment. Industrial PCs, laboratory instruments, imaging workstations, kiosks and embedded appliances where the operating system is validated as part of a wider system. These are disproportionately LTSB 2016.
- Procurement timing. Refresh cycles that land after the deadline for budgetary reasons.

These categories share an uncomfortable property: they tend to be the devices least likely to be well inventoried, most likely to run older application versions, and most likely to sit on networks where an intrusion has somewhere useful to go.

> Inventory by device, not by model. A firmware revision, a specialty PCIe card or a licensing dongle can make two nominally identical machines behave differently under migration. Reconcile physical inventory against network scans, endpoint management records and procurement data before assigning any device a disposition.

Why The Residual Estate Gets Worse Over Time

Three compounding effects apply to third-party applications on a residual Windows 10 estate.

Vendor support drift

Application vendors progressively drop Windows 10 from their supported platform matrix. When that happens, the device stops receiving application security updates entirely — not because you failed to deploy them, but because they no longer exist for that platform. This is a slow process and it is largely invisible unless someone is tracking supported-platform statements per application.

Management tooling drift

As estates migrate, the tooling and processes built around Windows 10 receive less attention. Deployment rings get reconfigured for the Windows 11 population. Reporting dashboards get rebuilt. The residual estate quietly falls out of the operational picture while remaining connected to the network.

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Assigning Every Device A Label

Every Windows 10 device needs exactly one of four dispositions, with a named owner and a dated exit plan. Devices without a label default to the worst outcome.

Disposition	Criteria	Application Patching Requirement
Migrate	Hardware Eligible, Applications Validated On Windows 11	Standard Process; Verify Application Inventory Transfers Correctly
Replace	Hardware Ineligible, Funded Refresh Scheduled	Full Coverage Until Decommission Date, Not Until The Purchase Order
ESU Bridge	Blocked By Validated Application Or Attached Equipment; Funded Exit Plan Exists	Highest Priority — OS Updates Continue, Applications Are Entirely On You
Isolate	Cannot Migrate, Cannot Be Patched Adequately, Must Remain In Service	Network Segmentation, Compensating Controls, Documented Risk Acceptance With Expiry

Disposition Framework. Review The Exception List On A Fixed Cadence With The Objective Of Shrinking It.

WHAT A FUNDED EXIT PLAN CONTAINS

- Named application owner and named operational owner per device
- Written vendor support statement for the proposed target platform
- Budget lines separated: ESU fees, migration engineering, application upgrades, hardware
- A dated review, with escalation for any device that has no funded path
- Verification that ESU activation succeeded — deploy a covered update to a test device and confirm in update history before rolling out