Article

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Preparing for Exchange 2016/2019 retirement

October 14, 2025 may already be a familiar date with the end of support for Windows 10, but that isn't the only Microsoft product affected: Microsoft announced both current versions of Exchange Server, 2016 and 2019, will also reach end of life on that date, meaning no more security updates.



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The successor is 'Exchange Server Subscription Edition (SE)', due to be released in H2 (July or August) 2025. As its name suggests, there is now an ongoing license cost rather than the Capex model used to date for Exchange.

Why should I care, I use Exchange Online?

Whilst the vast majority of organisations have made the move to Exchange Online for the most part, many continue to rely on an Exchange Server for some functionality

- Management - as long as you synchronise accounts from on-premise Active Directory, the supported method to manage email properties is still Exchange Server tools, as the majority of Exchange Online properties are read-only.

- SMTP relay – many organisations need on-premise devices or applications to be able to send email, such as multi-function printers performing scan-to-email. If you're already keeping an Exchange server for management, you may well be using it for relay.

- Host on-premise objects – there may be reasons why certain objects have not been migrated to Exchange Online, and these have remained on-premise. These include applications requiring a mailbox that cannot support Exchange Online, public folders or dynamic distribution groups.

The risk of inaction

Once the end-of-life date is reached, there will no longer be security updates, bug fixes or technical support for older Exchange Server versions. Given the number of vulnerabilities observed in Exchange Server in recent years, this should be a major cause for concern.

If you use Exchange for SMTP relay, Microsoft will force your hand in this. Given the risk to the service, Exchange Online already throttles and eventually blocks traffic for out-dated Exchange Server versions. Expect anything other than Exchange SE to be affected after the end-of-life date.

Lastly, having unsupported software will impact your compliance with any regulators you may have, such as Cyber Essentials.

What should I do?

If you still have an Exchange Server, the issue isn't going to go away. You have two options

- Remove Exchange Server – If you can or have removed the reliance on Exchange Server, but still synchronise accounts from Active Directory, you can now remove it in a special way that preserves the ability to manage recipients. You need to be comfortable with management using Exchange PowerShell though, or use of a 3rd party GUI.

- Prepare to upgrade – If you need to keep Exchange, you should be prepared to switch to Exchange Server SE later when it is released later in the year. This will be a simple in-place upgrade for Exchange 2019. However, if you're on Exchange 2016 or an older Windows Server edition, spend the time now to transition to Exchange 2019 on the latest Windows Server OS you can, rather than in a rush once SE is released.

Note that in either case, a minimum Active Directory forest functional level of Server 2012 R2 is required. If your domain controllers are out-dated, add that to your to-do list.

How do I license Exchange Server SE?

Licensing has become more complex. As the name suggests, there is now an ongoing license cost (the same is true for SharePoint Server and Skype for Business Server). But you also need to have qualifying Online Services licenses to be able to purchase this, and different license levels give you different rights to software. Whilst the details may be subject to change when Exchange SE is released, this is what we know right now

M365 license type	License eligibility	Licenses to procure
Microsoft 365 E3/E5	License includes rights for • Exchange Server CALs (CAL equivalence) • Exchange Server (unlimited instances)	None
Other Office 365 Enterprise license e.g. Office 365 E3, E5	License includes rights for • Exchange Server CALs (CAL equivalence) • Exchange Server hybrid license (no on-prem mailboxes)	• If on-prem mailboxes: Exchange Server SE licenses • Otherwise: None

Other Exchange Online license e.g. Microsoft Business	License includes rights for • Rights to purchase Exchange Server subscription edition • Exchange Server hybrid license (no on-prem mailboxes)	• If on-prem mailboxes: Exchange Server SE licenses + CALs • If SMTP relay: CALs to cover users or devices • Otherwise: None
None	None	Exchange Server subscription Edition Server + CALs + Software Assurance

Need more help?

If you need more support in understanding your options, get in touch with one of our Technology Consultants here for more information on our team.