
Information Technology Policy

Use of Freeware Policy

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| <i>Contact</i> RA-itcentral@pa.gov | <i>Scheduled Review</i> April 2015 |

This Information Technology Policy (ITP) establishes enterprise-wide policy for the use of freeware.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Information Technology Policy (ITP) is to implement policy regarding the use of freeware by commonwealth agencies.

2. Background

Freeware is unsupported software that is available free of charge and can be used for unlimited time in a manner consistent with its end-user agreement. It is important to understand that since freeware software is not officially supported by an individual entity or community, all associated risks involved with using freeware fall solely on the end user. In addition, when considering the use of a freeware product it is critical that the end-user agreement is understood and complied with as it often imposes certain restrictions such as "non-commercial use," meaning that it is not suitable for use by business and/or government agencies. Other considerations include product validation and inherent security risks. Freeware does not offer guarantees on functionality and cannot be validated to ensure that the end user knows exactly what they are obtaining. It is typically distributed without its source code, which prevents examination and modification by its users.

It is important to note that freeware is not to be confused with "open source" software, which is normally free GNU/GPL-supported software whose source code is published and made available to the public, nor is it to be confused with shareware, which is licensed, trial-version software that can be used free for a

limited period of time. Both of these classes of free software differ from "freeware" in that they offer more reliability in areas of support and validation through the licenses by in which they are governed.

Agency Use of Freeware

Freeware offers potential users the benefit of using various programs without having to pay fees. Agency users may decide a particular freeware utility offers certain advantages not found in any of the current enterprise software products, but will still be tied to the stipulations of the freeware end-user agreement. It is important to understand that there may be legal liabilities for any usage that violates the terms of the agreement.

Inherent Security Vulnerabilities

Since freeware software lacks guaranteed support from a software vendor or the type of support GNU/GPL-licensed software receives from the open source community, it is unknown what vulnerabilities may exist in the underlying source code of the program. Embedded spyware/malware, Trojan horse programs, and macro execution are some examples of typical attack vectors that can be embedded within freeware and can often pass through anti-virus scans undetected. Because of the unknown nature of the underlying code in freeware software, allowing untested use of it in a production environment may pose an unacceptable security risk to Commonwealth assets and infrastructure.

Support Issues

Although freeware is free and does not carry a price tag per se, there are other costs and risks that need to be factored in when considering total cost-of-ownership. Typical compatibility issues experienced over time with other co-existing applications can be a particular problem for freeware applications. Since freeware applications are unsupported, there may be no way of resolving an issue other than trying to uninstall the program, which may or may not be easily accomplished. In addition, as newer versions of applications are rolled out through typical software lifecycles, upgrades to co-existing applications may need to take place to ensure compatibility. With freeware, users run the risk of not being able to obtain later versions when the product eventually becomes obsolete. The bottom line is that unsupported software can result in a costly interruption to service if it is too heavily depended upon or used in a way that creates interdependencies with other business applications.

3. Scope

This Information Technology Policy (ITP) applies to all departments, boards, commissions and councils under the Governor's jurisdiction. Agencies not under the Governor's jurisdiction are strongly encouraged to follow this ITP.

4. Policy

This policy in this ITP will address freeware in the context as defined above.

The Office of Administration/Office for Information Technology (OA/OIT) prohibits the use of freeware software not already adopted as a current product standard in any of the existing OA/OIT Information Technology Policies.

Agencies wishing to deploy freeware that conflicts with this policy are to submit a waiver request (refer to ITP-BUS004 – IT Waiver Review Process, for detailed information) and obtain approval from the Technical Architecture Review Board before installation of any product.

Agencies are solely responsible to ensure that the use of freeware will not invalidate the terms as specified in the end-user agreement and that the product does not conflict with existing support agreements. Agencies granted approval to use a freeware application are to have their appropriate legal office review the terms of the product agreement to ensure they are acceptable to the commonwealth.

Agencies are responsible for support and inventory control of freeware products. Freeware products to be used in production are to be tested and validated in a development environment to ensure security and quality control.

Trial version software is not considered freeware as defined by this policy and may be used for limited testing in production environments without going through the waiver process.

5. Related ITPs/Other References

- ITP-BUS004 – *IT Waiver Review Process*

6. Authority

- Executive Order 2011-05, Enterprise Information Technology Governance

7. Publication Version Control

It is the user’s responsibility to ensure they have the latest version of this publication. Questions regarding this publication are to be directed to RA-itcentral@pa.gov.

This chart contains a history of this publication’s revisions:

| Version | Date | Purpose of Revision |
|----------|------------|--|
| Original | 11/24/2008 | Base Document |
| | 10/25/2010 | ITB Refresh |
| | 4/2/2014 | ITP Reformat |
| | 7/11/14 | Section 4: removed reference to ITP-PRO001 and replaced with ITP-BUS004 for waiver request information; Section 5: added ITP-BUS004, removed ITP-PRO001 |

