

Migrating from Microsoft® Advanced Group Policy Management (AGPM) to SDM Software Change Manager for Group Policy/Intune (CMGPI)

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Overview

Microsoft® Advanced Group Policy Management (AGPM) has been used by many organizations over the last nearly 20 years to provide Group Policy Object (GPO) change control—an organized process for managing changes to Group Policy within a product environment. Unfortunately, Microsoft has established an end-of-life for this solution as of April, 2026. Organizations using AGPM (or other legacy Group Policy change control solutions for that matter) must plan to replace its functionality sooner rather than later to ensure a seamless transition to a more modern solution. This whitepaper describes the basic architecture & functionality of AGPM and how organizations can not only replace AGPM but also improve on the capabilities it provides by transitioning to <u>SDM Software's Change Manager for Group Policy/Intune (CMGPI)</u> solution.

AGPM Architecture

AGPM uses a relatively simple, if not dated, architecture. The "AGPM server" runs a service that runs in the context of the AGPM service account. That account performs activities on behalf of users. Those users manage GPO change control through the use of a Microsoft Management Console (MMC) snap-in extension to the Group Policy Management Console (GPMC). Backups of GPOs are stored on a Windows file system either local to the AGPM server or on a remote file share. The state of all GPOs managed by AGPM are stored in an XML file alongside those backups. So the main components of AGPM are:

- 1. The AGPM Server
- 2. The AGPM service, running on the AGPM server
- 3. A file folder where GPO backups and state are stored
- 4. An MMC client snap-in for users of AGPM to configure, edit and approve GPO changes

This simple approach has plusses and minuses. AGPM is easy to deploy and integrates seamlessly into the existing standard toolset of GPO administrators (GPMC). However, some of the limitations of AGPM become readily apparent when you start to deploy it to even moderate to large enterprises. Namely:

- A file system-based archive and state management system doesn't scale well to 100s or even 1000s of the GPOs and many users and is subject to corruption
- Users of the tool must install the MMC snap-in on any machine they plan to manage GPOs from, making remote or ad-hoc use difficult, with specialized knowledge required
- AGPM only targets the PDC emulator DC in a given domain. That means if the PDCe is busy or the GPO is open/locked, then updates to that GPO can fail

CMGPI Architecture

By contrast to AGPM, CMGPI uses a more modern, distributed architecture. The following diagram shows the architecture of CMGPI



CMGPI is a browser-based application, accessible from anywhere that the CMGPI server can be accessed from. CMGPI does require a SQL Server (or Azure SQL) repository but that allows the product to scale to much larger environments and provides a robust persistent and high-performance back-end for all operations that are managed by CMGPI. CMGPI also supports change control for Intune configuration profiles and integrates that seamlessly into the same UI that is used for managing Group Policy change. You can also manage GPO linking as a separate change control process in CMGPI, which is not available in AGPM.

Planning for Migrating Away from AGPM

When thinking about migration off AGPM and onto SDM Software's CMGPI product, it's important to think about the differences in approach between the two solutions, as well as the similarities. We present a comprehensive feature comparison of the two solutions at the end of this document, but here we want to drill into the specific differences that you'll need to think about as you plan to migrate away from AGPM.

• Scope of Management: AGPM, as a GPMC snap-in, only focuses on change control for changes to GPOs themselves. By contrast, CMGPI provides change control for not only GPOs but also the containers that they are linked to (site, domain or OU) and Intune Configuration Profiles as well. All 3 of these object types can be managed through a change control process in CMGPI.

- User Interface: AGPM relies on an MMC snap-in to the Microsoft GPMC console in order to provide its functionality. The snap-in client must be installed on every system where you have editors, approvers and reviewers. By contrast, CMGPI uses a **web interface** and can be accessed from anywhere with either Chrome or Edge browsers. CMGPI editors who will be editing GPOs specifically will require a "helper" app be installed on any system where they plan to edit GPOs, but otherwise users of CMGPI don't need any special software.
- Application Deployment: AGPM is deployed as a Windows service on a Windows server and uses a file-based archive, either local to the AGPM service or on a UNC path. CMGPI is deployed on a Windows Server as a service and uses IIS to provide web services. Instead of a file-based archive, CMGPI stores its data in a SQL Server (or Azure SQL) database for scalability, data robustness and high availability. Both AGPM and CMGPI rely on a service account to run their services and both can use a Group Managed Service Account (gMSA).
- Role-based access control: AGPM has essentially four roles—AGPM Administrator, Editor, Approver and Reviewer. CMGPI has 4 global roles—Product Administrator, GPO Creator, Break Glass and Auditor. The Product Administrator role is somewhat equivalent to AGPM Administrator in that it grants the ability to manage the CMGPI product configuration. Unlike AGPM, the Product Administrator role does not grant any inherited abilities to edit or approve GPOs. The CMGPI Auditor role is equivalent to the read-only Reviewer role in AGPM. But the Break Glass and GPO Creator roles are unique to CMGPI. In addition to global roles, any object managed by CMGPI will have Editor, Approver and, optionally, a separate Deployer role. This allows for two levels of approvals if you choose to use that. You can also just have one level of approval where the Approver is also the Deployer.

Additionally, CMGPI has the concept of "Administrative Containers" that allow you to group related GPOs, containers and Intune Profiles for the purposes of delegation. These logical containers are not supported in AGPM so when planning your migration to CMGPI, you'll need to consider whether you want to implement Administrative Containers as an additional part of your Role-based access control deployment.

• **Restricted Policies**: An additional capability that CMGPI has that AGPM does not is the ability to delegate access to specific policy areas within Group Policy. CMGPI gives you the ability to grant or deny access to, for example, per-computer Security Settings within the GPO namespace. This provides for an additional level of governance that goes well beyond what AGPM or Group Policy can do natively. You'll need to decide whether you want to take advantage of this feature and what users or groups will have access to which policy areas.

• Automation: While AGPM does have a small set of PowerShell cmdlets that allow you to automate some tasks, CMGPI provides for a full set of PowerShell capabilities for nearly every function with the product. If you can perform a task in the web UI in CMGPI, chances are you will also be able to perform that task via PowerShell using the included module.

Migrating History from AGPM to CMGPI

A key part of a seamless migration away from AGPM, and one that many customers ask about, is the ability to retain the history and backups that you've collected within AGPM over the years, as you migrate to CMGPI. CMGPI in fact includes a utility to migrate that history into CMGPI's database, so that you can ensure that a given GPO's backup and version history is retained when AGPM is retired. The following screenshots show this utility running to import AGPM history metadata and backups into CMGPI, where any GPOs that were controlled by AGPM and now controlled by CMGPI are migrated into the CMGPI product.



Figure 1 Launching the migration of AGPM history into CMGPI

Administrator: Windows PowerShell

mtty 1 HappenedAt: 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM Gement: updated gpp Liser: CURNIMAD/MFIB6 Suckup: STSP24-C eel-4751-8590-704d73dc8cb Links comment: updated gpp Liser: CURNIMAD/MFIB6 Suckup: STSP24-C eel-4751-8590-704d73dc8cb read successfully name is 9-18 GPO Nigration AMF Filter there is 6-015 bytes of zipped data weinton is Liser version: 11 in 05; 11 in 55;Vol; computer version: 4, 4 in sysvol; modification time is 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM weinton is Liser version: 11 in 05; 11 in 55;Vol; computer version: 4, 4 in sysvol; modification time is 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM weinton is Liser version: 11 in 05; 11 in 05;Vol; computer version: 4, 4 in sysvol; modification time is 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM weinton is Liser version: 11 in 05; 11 in 05;Vol; computer version: 4, 4 in sysvol; modification time is 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM weinton is Liser version: 11 in 05;Vol; computer version: 4, 4 in sysvol; modification time is 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM weinton is Liser version: 10 in 05;Vol; computer version: 4, 4 in sysvol; modification time is 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM weinton is Liser version: 10 in 05;Vol; computer version: 4, 4 in sysvol; modification time is 6/2/2025 12:31:39 PM weinton is Liser version: 10 in 05;Vol; ComPUNDENDETE False False True 1: VF AURINGIN_VSVETM permotPOddItScurrityAndDelete False False True 2: CUPRUMAD/ADMENT permotPOddItScurrityAndDelete False False True 3: CUPRUMAD/ADMENT permotPOddItScurrityAndDelete False False True 4: Vistory state: (CONTROLLED(redCKED_IN) HappenedA: C/2025 12:29:30 PM Comment: sting this modercontrol Machage: sting this sting by bytes of finped data version is User version; 0; no 15; 9 in 05; 9 in 05

Figure 2 AGPM migration progressing

When the migration is completed, you will see evidence of it in CMGPI, both within the Audit log and within the history of any given GPO.

| Audit log | | | | | | | | ee Ac | tions | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--|--|---|------------------------------------|--|-------------------|-------------|---------|
| A Events found: | 1000 (The limit for dis | played search results has been re | eached. Use filters to narrow down yo | ur search.) | | Export | BE History for Cuprumat | AGPM Controlled GPO | hange Control | | | - 0 | - × |
| Date and ∇ | Activity 🖓 | Object 오 | Location | Status 🖓 | User | | Al States Unique Version | s | Changed By | Comment | Deletable | Compute | User |
| Time | | Controlled GPU | | | | Cuprumad AGPM | 36/3/2025 12:51:55 P | 4 Production: Current | AGPM Service Accoun | | Not applicable | 3 | 3 |
| 6/3/25, 12:41 PM | 📲 Grant role | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Success | CUPRUMAD\df186 | Controlled GPO | 6/3/2025 12:43:35 P 6/3/2025 12:32:42 P 6/3/2025 12:31:42 P 6/3/2025 12:31:42 P | 4 Deployed 4 Checked in 4 Controlled 4 Production: Created | (df186) (df186) (df186) * | updated security policy Bringing this under control | Yes Yes Yes | 8 8 0 | 0 |
| 6/3/25, 12:41 PM | 省 Grant role | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Started | CUPRUMAD\df186 | Date and Time 6/3/25, 12:31 PM Location CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | | | | | | | |
| 6/3/25, 12:41 PM | 🏜 Grant role | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Success | CUPRUMAD\df186 | User CUPRUMAD\df186 Status Success | | | | | | | |
| 6/3/25, 12:41 PM | 嶺 Grant role | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Started | CUPRUMAD\df186 | Canonical Name (Policies/{1F86385E-30C1- 419F-9484-9F810BC32AB3} | | | | | | | |
| 6/3/25, 12:33 PM | Take control | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Success | CUPRUMAD\df186 | AGPM] CONTROLLED Description Bringing this under control | | | | | | | |
| 6/3/25, 12:33 PM | Take control | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Started | CUPRUMAD\df186 | (version 1.0) Severity Ticket | < Settings | Differences | | | | Clo | > se |
| 6/3/25, 12:32 PM | Check-in | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Success | CUPRUMAD\df186 | number | | | | | | | |
| 6/3/25, 12:31 PM | Control | Cuprumad AGPM Controlled GPO | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Success | CUPRUMAD\df186 | | | | | | | | |
| 6/3/25, 12:30 PM | Check-out | Baseline | CUPRUMAD.LOCAL | Success | CUPRUMAD\df186 | * | | Advanced | | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | ÷ | | | | | | | | |

Figure 3 CMGPI Audit log of imported AGPM history

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Feature Comparison

The following table articulates many of the differences in features between AGPM and CMGPI:

| Feature/Benefit | | SDM Change Manager for Group Policy & Intune | AGPM |
|---|--|--|----------------|
| Change Control and Approval Workflow | | √ ■ | ✓ ■ |
| Version Tracking and History | | √ ■ | √ = |
| GPO/Intune Settings Search | | ✓ ■ | Х |
| Role-Based Delegation | Auditor | √ ■ | Х |
| | Creator | √ ■ | Х |
| | Approver | √ ∎ | √ ∎ |
| | Editor | √ ∎ | √ • |
| Change Control of Security Filtering on GPOs | | √ • | Х |
| Change Control of WMI Filters | | ✓ ■ | Х |
| Controlling GPO's | Controlling | √ ■ | ✓ ■ |
| | Uncontrol | √ ■ | Х |
| Deployment | Immediate | ✓ ■ | √ • |
| | Scheduled | √ ■ | X |
| Cancel a workflow | Cancel Approval | √ ■ | √ = |
| | Cancel Scheduled Deployment | √ ∎ | Х |
| Web-Based Client | | √ ■ | Х |
| Comprehensive PowerShell Module | | ~ • | X (limit of 6) |
| Email alerting of Changes | Modification (create, Deploy, Delete) | ✓ ■ | √ ■ |
| | Overdue Approvals | ✓ ■ | Х |
| | Overdue Checkouts | √ ■ | Х |
| | Failed Deployments | √ ■ | Х |
| | Pending Check-in | √ ■ | Х |
| Change Control of Containers for linking/unlinking | | √ ■ | Х |
| Automatic Detection of Out-Of- Band Changes | Automatic Compliance Detection | ✓ ■ | Х |
| Full Change Control of Intune Configuration Profiles | | ✓ ■ | X |
| Multi-Forest Support | | √ ■ | Х |
| SQL High-Availability | | √ ■ | Х |

| Feature/Benefit | | SDM Change Manager for Group Policy & Intune | AGPM |
|--|--|--|------|
| Support for Azure EntralD | SSO | ✓ ■ | Х |
| | Delegation to EntraID Users and Groups | √ ■ | X |
| Global Settings Search | | ✓ ■ | ✓ ■ |
| Administrative Containers for GPO and Intune profiles | | ✓ ■ | Х |
| Azure SQL Database Support | | ✓ ■ | Х |
| Delete and Restore (recycling bin) | | √ ■ | √ ■ |
| Severity and Change Ticket Number fields for check-ins | | √ ■ | X |
| Logging Support to Azure Blob Storage | | √ ■ | Х |
| High Availability (HA) | | ✓ ■ | Х |
| Support for Government Cloud | | √ ■ | Х |
| Ability to restrict individual policy are within GPOs | ability to prevent a user who can otherwise edit a GPO, from being able to edit specific setting areas | √ ■ | Х |
| 3 Levels of approval | editor, approver and deployer as separate roles | √ ■ | Х |
| Set GPO naming standards that are enforced in the product | | √ ■ | X |
| Export GPOs that are checked out to GPMC backups to use in testing | | ~ | ✓ ■ |
| The ability to send CMGPI notification to a Microsoft Teams channel | S | ~ | Х |

Summary

AGPM provided basic GPO change control for many years to users of Group Policy. But with its imminent retirement, and the continuing need for not only GPO change control but also the full lifecycle of GPO change and now Intune change, SDM Software's CMGPI provides a more modern, complete and highly available solution to be able to fully manage change of these important technologies within your environment. You can download a trial version of CMGPI and evaluate the product for yourself at https://sdmsoftware.com/group-policy-management-products/change-manager-for-group-policy/, or contact us for a detailed walkthrough.