

TECH / HP / REPORT

HP has found an exciting new way to DRM your printer! / Where 'HP Plus' means 'HP + permanent DRM.'

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The HP Deskjet 2755e, a printer that prompts you to use HP Plus to get free ink. Image: HP

A mazon's No. 1 bestselling printer is the [HP Deskjet 2755e](#). It's not hard to see why. For just \$85, you get a wireless color printer, scanner, *and* six months of free ink. It

also comes with HP Plus, one of the most dastardly schemes Big Inkjet has ever unleashed. I'm not talking about how printers quietly waste their own ink, or pretend cartridges are empty when they're not, or lock out official cartridges from other regions. Heck, I'm not even talking about "Dynamic Security," the delightful feature where new HP firmware updates secretly contain malware that blocks batches of third-party cartridges while pretending to harden your printhead against hacks.

No, the genius of HP's latest scheme is that it's hiding in plain sight, daring you to unwittingly sign away your rights. Take the free ink, and HP controls your printer for life.

First introduced in 2020 at the height of the pandemic, HP Plus was built around FOMO right from the start. You get just seven days to claim your free ink, starting the moment you plug a new printer into the wall. Act now, and it'll also extend your warranty a full year, give you an "Advanced HP Smart app," and plant trees on your behalf. Because *why wouldn't you want to save the forest?*

Here's one reason, as detailed in a new complaint by the International Imaging Technology Council (IITC) that might turn into a false advertising fight: HP Plus comes with a firmware update that utterly removes your printer's ability to accept third-party ink. You have to buy "genuine" HP ink as long as you use the printer.

Not all of HP's fine print is this obvious. Screenshot by Sean Hollister / The Verge

Why wouldn't you want to save the forest? Oh

It's not clear exactly *how* HP has managed to fully block third-party cartridges, but it appears to be true. My own local [CompAndSave](#), which distributes ink cartridges from some of the biggest third-party manufacturers in the world, tells me those vendors have not yet found a way to get their aftermarket carts (or even user-refilled "genuine HP" cartridges) working with an HP Plus printer.

It'd be one thing if you could cancel HP Plus and start using your printer normally again, but nope! Even though HP claims you can "change or cancel anytime," there's no way to deactivate the firmware, HP's own tech support told the IITC. (A *Verge* source corroborates this as well.)

"In fact, the only way a customer can get rid of HP+ once activated is to buy a new printer," the IITC writes. HP didn't answer our questions about the firmware update, including why it isn't prominently disclosed that there's no way to uninstall it.

The IITC, a group that represents ink cartridge remanufacturers, isn't suing the world's leading printer company just yet. The complaint instead seeks to push back on HP's environmental credentials by petitioning a nonprofit organization, the Global Electronics Council (GEC), which maintains an "EPEAT" registry of environmentally sound products.

Would you like to see the crux of that argument? I went full Blinking White Guy when I saw: HP, the company that repeatedly admits it blocks third-party cartridges *for your own good*, is telling an environmental group it doesn't do that at all.

"HP printers are not designed to prevent the use of non-manufacturer cartridges," the company claims. Image: International ITC

See, when HP gets these printers on the EPEAT registry, it successfully greenwashes its reputation. The company gets to stick EPEAT labels all over its website and products, each of which suggests an independent third party has certified that HP genuinely cares about the planet.

But EPEAT has a very specific rule that certified printers *cannot prevent the use of non-OEM cartridges*, and HP Plus is just the latest in a long line of ways that HP ties you to its own ink.

Incredibly, the Global Electronics Council seems to be well aware of HP Plus and is mostly playing along. For example, the HP Deskjet 2755e and family are currently considered

EPEAT Silver, with only a footnote that “the optional HP+ configuration does not meet required criterion 4.9.2.1.”

HP’s “Dynamic Security” in action. Image: u/grhhull (Reddit)

“[A]ny printer that is documented as including HP+ should not be eligible for EPEAT registration,” the IITC argues, adding that HP’s Dynamic Security feature is also a clear violation of the same rule — since even HP admits it’s designed to “block cartridges using non-HP chips or modified or non-HP electronic circuitry.”

The IITC says HP has issued four “killer firmware updates” in the last eight weeks alone to quietly block third-party cartridges from working in EPEAT-registered HP inkjet printers

and at least 26 against HP laser printers. HP didn't answer our question about EPEAT compliance.

But I don't want you to get too distracted with "Dynamic Security," because I haven't *quite* finished warning you about HP's free ink.

Here are a few choice quotes from the terms and conditions for HP's ink service that I think you'll appreciate (bolding mine):

You expressly allow HP to remotely change, patch, update or otherwise modify Your printer's software, firmware or programming remotely, without notice to You, in order to provide the Service to You or to comply with applicable laws

Remote monitoring may include provision to HP of one or more of: page counts, types of documents printed (e.g., Word, PowerPoint, pdf, jpeg, etc.), types of devices that initiated print jobs, printer serial number, cartridge information (e.g. HP original cartridge status, and whether the cartridge was new or used at the time of its last insertion into the printer), **and other similar types of metrics related to your Service as may be added by HP from time to time**

You agree to maintain connectivity of Your Printer to the Internet and to not remove or disable any remote monitoring software or functionality on Your Printer

If Your printer is not connected to the Internet, then the Subscription Cartridges (as defined in section d. below) **will be disabled**, and You will not be able to use them to print; however, You will continue to be charged for the Service as described in Section 7 ("Paying for Your Service"). In order to reactivate disabled cartridges, You will need to reconnect Your printer to the Internet and **keep it connected**

When Your Service is cancelled for any reason, HP will remotely disable the Subscription Cartridges and You will no longer be able to print with the Subscription Cartridges. In such a case, you will need to purchase a regular HP cartridge compatible with your printer, in order to continue printing

HP may increase or otherwise change the Service Plan Fee and Overage Fee, **and add additional fees**, for any Service Plan, or otherwise change or add Service Plans **at any time in HP's sole discretion** with prior notice to You

Printer ink is one of the most expensive fluids in the entire world. Free ink is tempting! But please don't take the free ink. Please *do* make fun of Inkjet Supply and Hostage Situations Incorporated until these companies change their tune. (There is precedent.)

And maybe buy a Brother instead.

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