



CHECKLIST

VMware vSphere VM Snapshot Cleanup Best Practices Checklist

A practical checklist for identifying, validating, and safely removing stale VM snapshots in vSphere without disrupting active workloads.

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Use this checklist before removing or consolidating VM snapshots in production or near-production environments.

1) Identify the snapshot and its context

- ☐ Record the VM name, datastore, snapshot name, and snapshot age.
- ☐ Note the number of snapshots in the chain.
- ☐ Confirm whether the snapshot was created for patching, troubleshooting, testing, or rollback.
- ☐ Verify who requested the snapshot and who owns the workload.
- ☐ Check whether the snapshot is part of a documented change, incident, or maintenance window.

2) Confirm whether the snapshot is still needed

- ☐ Ask the VM owner or change owner to confirm the snapshot is no longer required.
- ☐ Verify that rollback is no longer expected for the related change.



- ☐ Confirm the snapshot is not being held as a recovery point for an active issue.
- ☐ Validate that the original purpose of the snapshot has ended.
- ☐ Escalate if ownership or purpose is unclear.

3) Check for backup and recovery dependencies

- ☐ Confirm no backup job depends on the snapshot chain.
- ☐ Confirm no replication workflow requires the snapshot.
- ☐ Check whether any automation, orchestration, or recovery process references the snapshot.
- ☐ Verify there is no pending restore test or rollback procedure tied to the snapshot.
- ☐ Make sure the snapshot is not part of a change-control safeguard still in use.

4) Assess storage and workload risk

- ☐ Verify datastore free space is sufficient for merge activity.
- ☐ Review recent datastore growth trends.
- ☐ Check for storage contention or elevated latency on the VM's datastore.
- ☐ Confirm the VM is not already under heavy I/O load.
- ☐ Review the snapshot size and whether delta growth is unusually large.
- ☐ Identify whether the VM is latency-sensitive or business-critical.

5) Inspect the snapshot chain for anomalies

- ☐ Confirm the snapshot chain is intact.
- ☐ Check for unexpectedly large, old, or multiple snapshots.
- ☐ Look for signs of consolidation issues or orphaned delta files.
- ☐ Verify the VM does not already show signs of snapshot-related performance degradation.



- ☐ Pause and investigate if the chain appears incomplete or abnormal.

6) Decide whether removal is safe now

- ☐ The snapshot has a documented purpose that has clearly ended.
- ☐ The owner has approved removal.
- ☐ No backup, replication, or recovery workflow depends on it.
- ☐ The datastore has enough headroom for merge operations.
- ☐ The VM can tolerate short-term I/O impact during cleanup.
- ☐ The chain looks healthy and removable.

If any item above is unchecked, do not remove the snapshot yet.

7) Prepare for cleanup

- ☐ Schedule removal during a suitable maintenance window if the VM is critical.
- ☐ Notify stakeholders who may be affected by storage or performance impact.
- ☐ Confirm monitoring is in place for datastore space, latency, and VM health.
- ☐ Ensure you have a fallback plan if consolidation takes longer than expected.
- ☐ Document the reason for removal and the approver.

8) Remove or consolidate the snapshot

- ☐ Use the approved vSphere method to remove the snapshot.
- ☐ If needed, consolidate the VM after removal.
- ☐ Do not force cleanup without understanding the chain impact.
- ☐ Allow time for merge operations to complete.
- ☐ Keep an eye on storage performance during the process.



9) Validate after removal

- ☐ Confirm the snapshot no longer appears in vSphere.
- ☐ Verify delta files have been removed or merged as expected.
- ☐ Confirm the VM continues running normally.
- ☐ Check application health, guest responsiveness, and backup status.
- ☐ Review datastore free space and latency after cleanup.
- ☐ Document the completion time and any issues encountered.

10) Operational rules of thumb

- ☐ Treat snapshots as temporary, not as backups.
- ☐ Use age as a signal, not the only decision factor.
- ☐ Require owner confirmation before removing production snapshots.
- ☐ Avoid age-based automated deletion for critical systems without human review.
- ☐ Make snapshot cleanup part of routine operational hygiene.

Quick decision guide

- Remove now if the snapshot is clearly stale, owner-approved, and has no dependency.
- Delay removal if storage is tight, workload impact is high, or timing is poor.
- Investigate first if the chain is abnormal, ownership is unclear, or backup tools may depend on it.

Cleanup record

- VM name: _____



- Datastore: _____
- Snapshot name: _____
- Snapshot age: _____
- Reason created: _____
- Owner approving removal: _____
- Removal date/time: _____
- Post-removal validation completed: Yes / No
- Notes: _____

Final reminder

Snapshot cleanup is a controlled change, not a housekeeping shortcut. Remove only what is no longer needed, and verify the VM and storage environment are ready before you proceed.