Kubernetes 1.38 deprecations and breaking changes to check before upgrading

27 November 2026 · 4 min read · blogs.iictp.org/kubernetes-1-38-deprecations-breaking-changes

Short answer: Kubernetes 1.38 is the next minor release of the container orchestrator, planned for 16 December 2026, and the release team previewed its removals and breaking changes on 23 November 2026. The largest operational change is that the kubelet will by default require the container runtime to report the cgroup driver. It matters because nodes with an older runtime can fail to register after an upgrade.

TL;DR The short version

- Kubernetes 1.38 is planned for 16 December 2026, and the release team previewed its removals and breaking changes on 23 November.
- The biggest change is that the kubelet will by default require the container runtime to report the cgroup driver.
- Nodes with an older runtime can fail to register after the upgrade, so check runtime versions and test on a staging cluster first.

Read online, listen to it, or change the text size: https://blogs.iictp.org/kubernetes-1-38-deprecations-breaking-changes

What is changing in Kubernetes 1.38?

The Kubernetes blog post lists planned changes based on the state of the release at the time of writing, and says they may change before release. They fall into removed command-line options, a changed node startup requirement, altered swap behaviour, and features expected to become stable.

Breaking change: the cgroup driver must come from the runtime

- The modern path is the Container Runtime Interface RuntimeConfig call, which reports the recommended cgroup driver.
- In 1.38 the legacy method is off unless you re-enable it with the temporary LegacyCgroupDriverFallback feature gate.
- The cgroupDriver field in the kubelet configuration is deprecated, and the kubelet rejects it unless that gate is enabled.
- If the kubelet cannot get the driver after retrying, it exits before registering the node.
- kubeadm stops setting the driver by default, and its preflight check errors if the runtime lacks the call.

Removals and behaviour changes

- The variables KUBECTL_REMOTE_COMMAND_WEBSOCKETS and KUBECTL_PORT_FORWARD_WEBSOCKETS are removed. kubectl tries WebSockets first and falls back to SPDY.
- In the stable kuberc API, credential plugin allowlist entries use command. The older name field is not included.
- Pods on LimitedSwap nodes that use pod-level resources get swap limits from pod-level memory settings. A pod whose memory request equals its limit gets no swap.
- Support for cgroup v1 continues to be phased out. Since 1.35 the kubelet fails to start on such nodes unless failCgroupV1 is set to false.
- Admission webhooks no longer receive virtual writes such as TokenReview and SubjectAccessReview, a default since 1.37.

Features the release team expects

- kuberc user preferences graduating to stable.
- Pod-level CPU and memory resources graduating to stable.
- Dynamic Resource Allocation support for partitionable devices, such as GPU slices, graduating to stable.
- An alpha EvictionRequest API that lets applications prepare before a pod is evicted. It does not replace PodDisruptionBudgets.

Limitations and open questions

- A sneak peek is not the changelog. Feature stages can slip.
- The post does not list which runtime versions satisfy the new requirement; check your runtime’s documentation and the final release notes.
- Managed Kubernetes providers set their own schedules and may configure nodes for you.

Sources were read on 27 November 2026. Products, rules and data change, so check the linked originals before you rely on any detail.

How to prepare your cluster

1. List the container runtime and version on every node pool and confirm it reports the cgroup driver.
2. Move any remaining nodes from cgroup v1 to cgroup v2.
3. Search kubelet configuration and automation for cgroupDriver.
4. Remove the two kubectl WebSocket variables from scripts and pipelines.
5. Change name to command in kuberc allowlists.
6. Test swap-dependent workloads, then upgrade a non-production pool first.

What it means for platform engineers

Add the runtime check to your upgrade preflight now, while there is time before December. If you also run the IPVS proxy mode, plan that move separately: see kube-proxy IPVS removal. GPU platform teams should read the partitionable device documentation before changing allocation.

Frequently asked questions

- **When is Kubernetes 1.38 released?** The preview gives a planned date of 16 December 2026.
- **What is the main breaking change in Kubernetes 1.38?** The runtime must report the cgroup driver unless a temporary fallback gate is enabled.
- **Is cgroup v1 removed in 1.38?** No. The opt-out remains in 1.38, but removal is planned for a later release.
- **Does EvictionRequest replace PodDisruptionBudgets?** No.

Related reading

- kube-proxy IPVS removal and nftables
- What is Kubernetes?
- Serverless vs containers
- Cloud Architecture Practitioner certification

> Related credential: Cloud Architecture Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. Kubernetes Blog. Kubernetes v1.38 Sneak Peek. 23 November 2026. kubernetes.io/blog/2026/11/23/kubernetes-v1-38-sneak-peek

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