How to fix 'Windows Cannot Access the Specified Device, Path or File' error

Are you experiencing the Windows Cannot Access the Specified Device, Path or File error message on Windows 10 or 11? This problem usually appears when you try to run an EXE application or open a document.

When this error occurs, you cannot run some programs or access some documents, limiting the usefulness of your computer.

So how to solve the "Cannot access the specified device" error? Take a look at some troubleshooting steps you can take below.

1. Run the application with admin rights

Some programs, for various reasons, require admin privileges to perform specific tasks. In fact, in certain cases, you may not be able to open them either.

The error 'Windows Cannot Access the Specified Device, Path or File' can also be a result of this problem. So, if you are looking to fix this error, running the application with admin rights will be the best option for you. If the problem is due to lack of admin privileges, your application will run when these steps are completed.

2. Disable unwanted application blocking feature

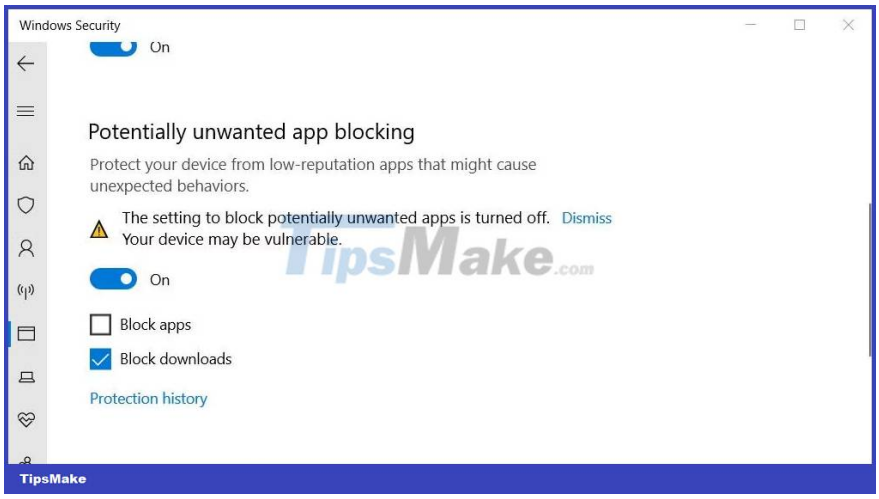
Unwanted application blocking is a feature of Windows Security that helps prevent applications and software of low reputation from running. That feature may cause a "Cannot access the specified device" error when enabled. You can check if unwanted app blocking is enabled and disable it as follows:

1. Double-click the shield icon (Windows Security) inside the system tray area to the right of the taskbar. You may also need to click the small up arrow on the taskbar to see the system tray icons.

2. Select the **App & browser control** tab in Windows Security.

3. Then click the **Reputation-based protection settings** link to see more settings.

4. Uncheck the **Block apps** checkbox if that feature is enabled.



3. Uncheck the "Unblock File" setting

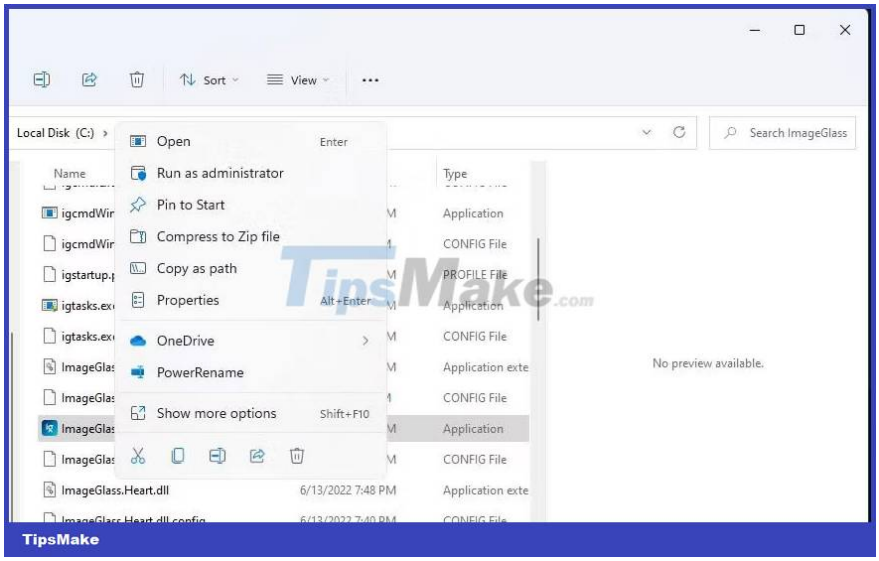
Sometimes Windows blocks access to files or folders downloaded from untrusted online sources, which can cause the "Cannot access the specified device" error. When that happens, you will see an **Unblock** checkbox on the affected file properties window. Here's how you can uncheck the **"Unblock file"** setting :

Warning : Make sure you trust the source of the file before doing this. If you unblock an infected file, it can damage your computer and cause file loss.

1. Right-click **Start (taskbar button) and select the File Explorer** option from the menu.

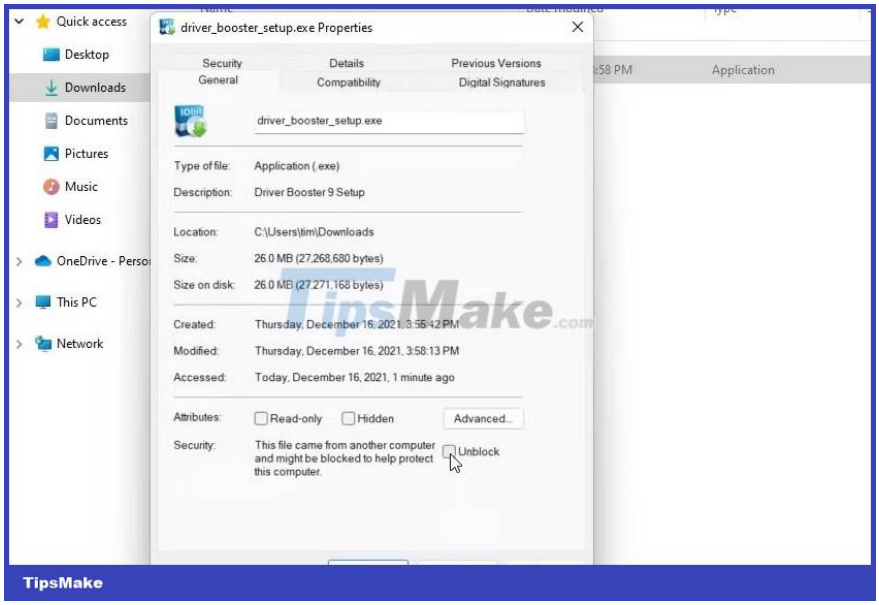
2. Open a folder containing the file where the error occurred.

3. Right click on the affected file and select **Properties** .



4. Click **General** if the properties window does not open with that tab by default.

5. Then uncheck the **Unblock** selected checkbox if you can see it.



6. Select **Apply** to save the new file settings.

7. Click **OK** to close the file properties window.

4. Edit file permissions

Another cause of the "Cannot access the specified device" error message is insufficient file access permissions. That's something you can fix by editing permissions for the affected files. So, try editing the permissions of the affected file as follows:

1. Open the folder containing the file that caused the "Cannot access the specified device" error.

2. Right-click on the affected file and select its **Properties option.**

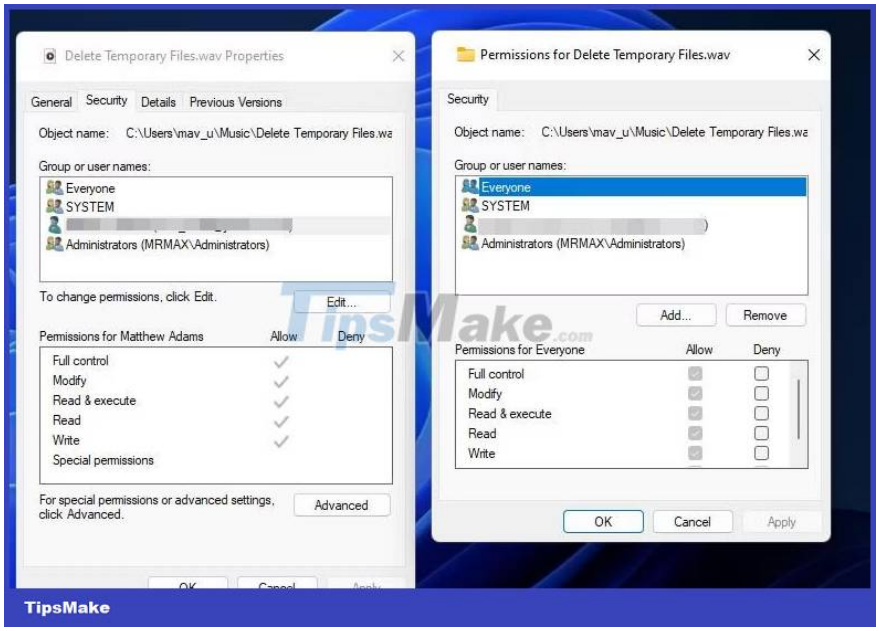
3. Select **Security** in the properties window.

4. Then select the Windows user account with which you are logged in.

5. Click the **Edit** button .

6. Select your Windows user account on the permissions window that opens.

7. Uncheck all selected **Deny permission check boxes.**



8. Select **Apply** to set the new permission settings.

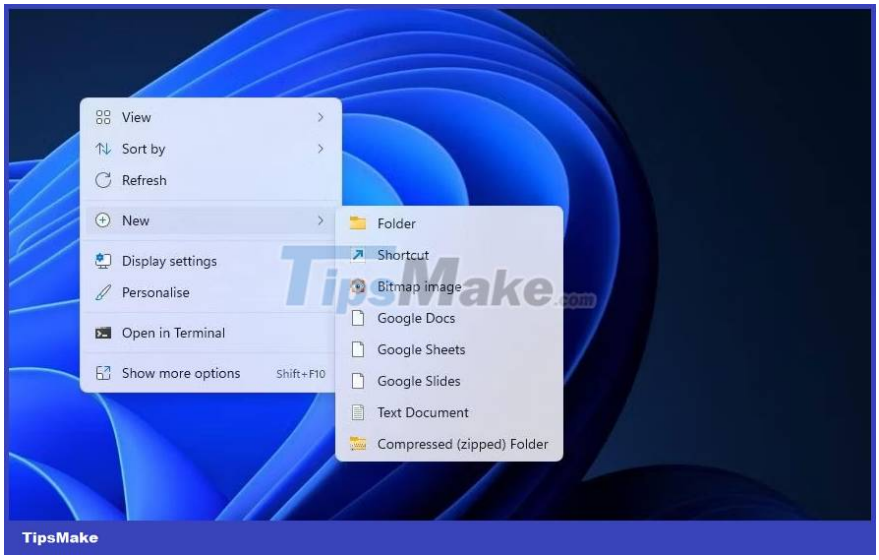
9. Click the OK buttons on all windows.

5. Re-create the program shortcut

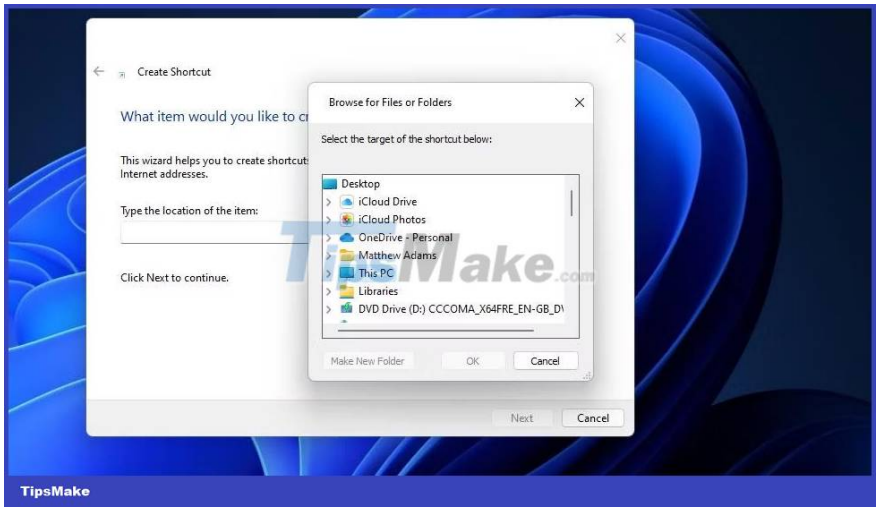
If the "Cannot access the specified device" error occurs when you try to run a program shortcut, the problem may lie with the shortcut itself. In this case, setting up a new shortcut for the affected software may resolve the problem. Here's how to do it on your computer:

1. Right-click on any empty part of the desktop and select **New** .

2. Click the shortcut to display the desktop shortcut adding tool.



3. Then, click **Browse** to select the EXE file where the error occurred and press the **OK button.**



4. Select **Next** and enter the shortcut title in the text box.

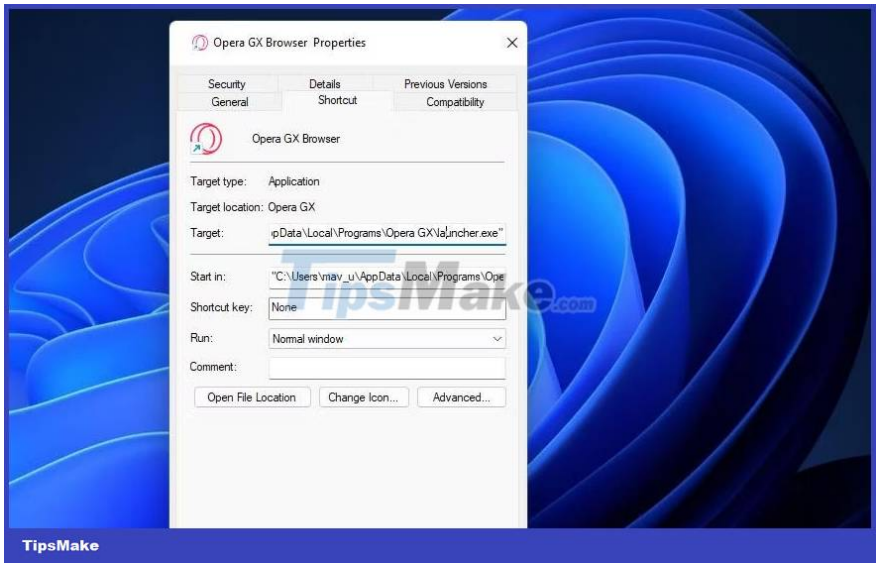
5. Click **Finish** to add a new program shortcut.

6. Right-click on the old program shortcut to select **Delete** (trash button in Windows 11).

6. Carefully check the location of the file

Do you install software and save some files to an external or network hard drive? If so, an access error may occur because the file located on the drive is currently inaccessible.

Double check the location of the files you are trying to run or open by right-clicking on their desktop shortcut and selecting **Properties** . You can then check the path for the shortcut in the **Target** box shown directly below.



That Target box will display whether the file is located on another drive or not. If so, connect the external hard drive containing the file to your PC to access the file. Double check that the specified file has not been deleted if

the **Target** box refers to the local C: drive. To do that, open the specified folder path in File Explorer.

If you discover that the shortcut's file has been deleted, you can retrieve that file. Open the Recycle Bin to see if the file is in there. If so, right-click the file and select **Restore** .

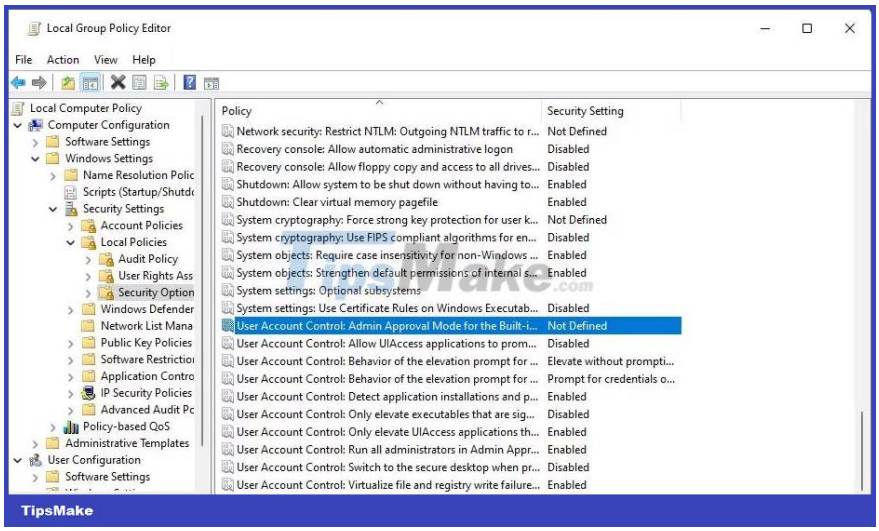
7. Enable admin rights with Group Policy Editor

Users have confirmed that enabling admin approval mode in Group Policy Editor can resolve this file access error. However, Group Policy Editor is only available in Windows 11, Windows 10 Pro and Enterprise editions. If you can use Group Policy Editor, try enabling admin approval as follows:

1. Open Group Policy Editor and select **Computer Configuration** in the utility.

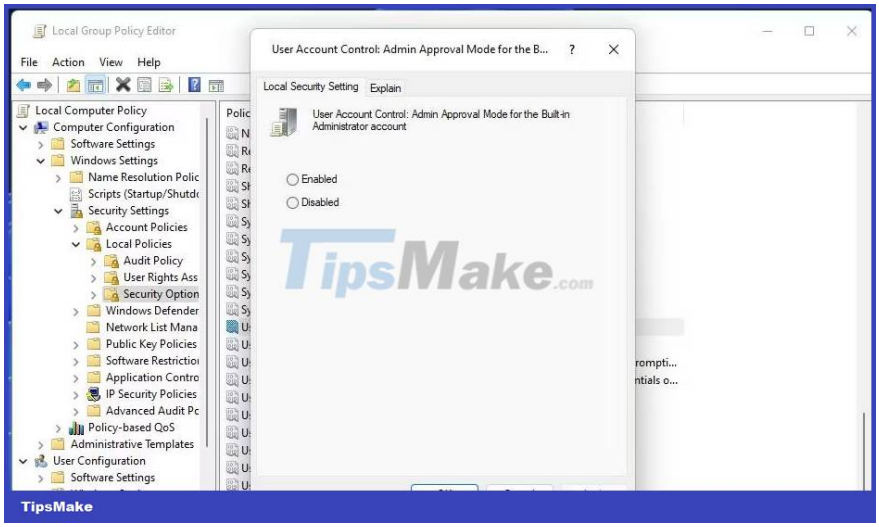
2. Double-click **Windows Settings** to expand that configuration category.

3. Then, double-click **Security Settings** > **Local Policies** > **Security Options** in the Group Policy Editor sidebar.



4. Double-click the policy **Admin Approval Mode for Built-in Administrator account.**

5. Then select the **Enabled** button .

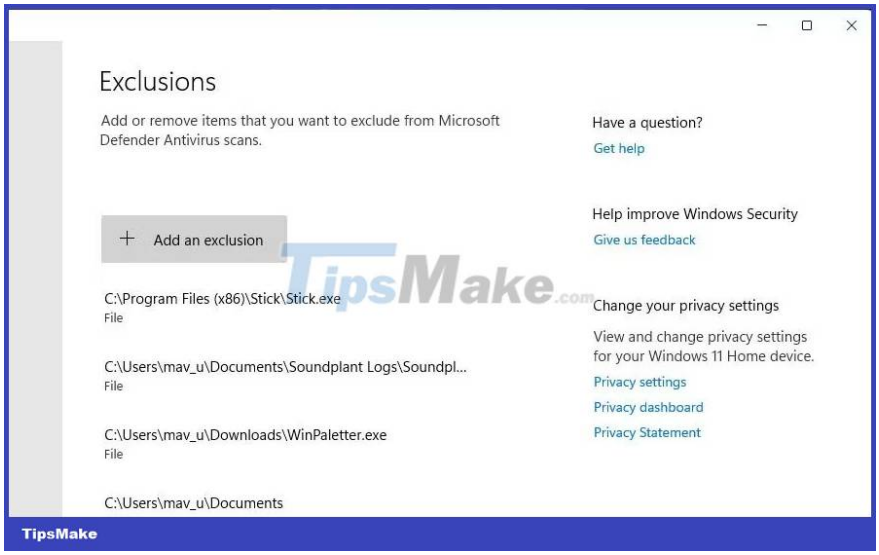


6. Click **Apply** to set up the policy.

7. Select **OK** to exit the policy settings window and close the Group Policy Manager utility.

8. Set up the affected software or files to exclude Windows Security

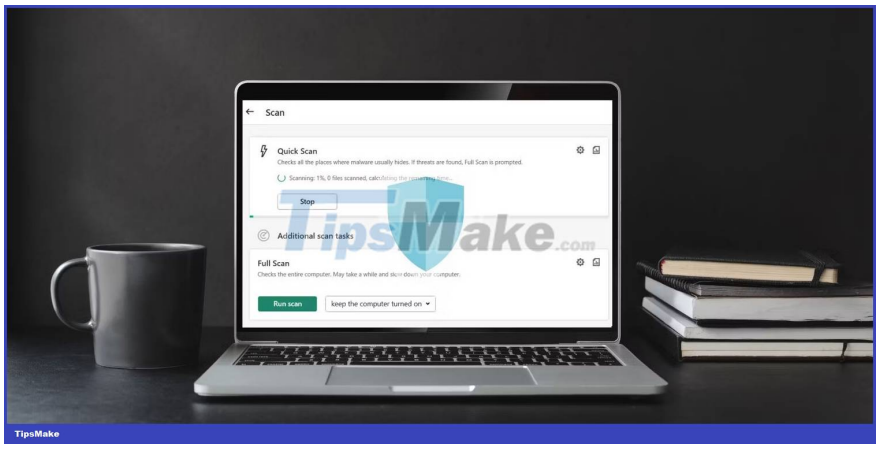
Because Windows Security blocking measures can cause this error, users should add affected files to the antivirus application's exclusion list. Doing so will exclude the file from Defender's antivirus protection. Check out TipsMake.com.com's guide on how to whitelist files in Microsoft Defender (formerly Windows Defender) for details on how to apply this potential solution.



9. Temporarily disable any active third-party security software

Some third-party antivirus applications share similar application blocking features as Windows Security. Therefore, alternative security software may also cause the same problem to occur. So, try disabling any third-

party antivirus software installed on your PC before trying to run the affected EXE software.



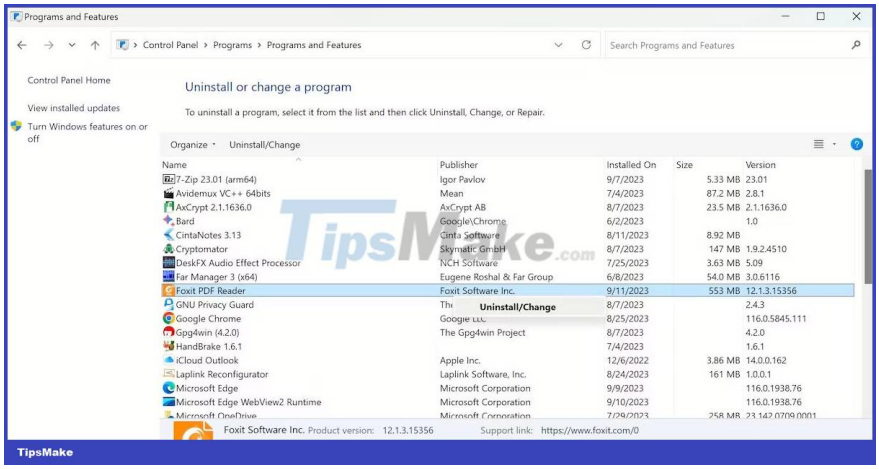
The exact way to disable third-party antivirus applications varies slightly. However, most have a context menu that you can select to disable their protection. Right-click the system tray icon for the antivirus software to see its context menu. Then select an option to disable its antivirus capabilities from there.

If this potential solution works, you'll know what caused it. However, do not turn off your antivirus software, but add the affected files to the security software's exception list.

10. Repair or reinstall the file

If you are experiencing this problem due to a corrupt file, repairing or reinstalling it is the best way to go. Using Control Panel will be your best choice in this case. Here's how you can do it:

1. Go to the search bar in the Start menu, type 'control panel' and select the most relevant result.
2. From there, go to **Programs** .
3. Then select **Programs and Features** .
4. Right click on any program and select **Uninstall/Change** .



Depending on the app, you'll have the option to remove or change its settings. Just follow the on-screen instructions and you'll be done in no time. If you have already installed the app, make sure you download it from a trusted source and then see if you get the same error again.

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