

Steam Beta Adds Pyrowave Codec for Lower-Latency Remote Play

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In brief

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Valve has added an experimental video codec called Pyrowave to the Steam Client beta. The codec gives Steam Remote Play a high-bandwidth option designed to reduce streaming latency. It is available on Windows and macOS, and on Linux when the experimental SteamRT3 Steam Client is enabled.

Valve describes Pyrowave as a high-bandwidth, low-latency codec. It uses the host and client GPUs to encode and decode frames, while supporting YUV 4:4:4 color and HDR when the connected hardware supports them. The feature is aimed at people streaming games or a desktop across a fast local network.

Pyrowave trades bandwidth for latency

Most video codecs try to reduce the amount of data sent across the network. Pyrowave is designed to use more bandwidth to reduce streaming latency. Valve says it can use five to ten times more bandwidth than other streaming codecs, so it recommends connecting both computers directly to the router with at least Gigabit Ethernet.

That makes Pyrowave a better fit for a wired home network where a gaming PC and a second computer are close to the router. It is less suitable for a congested Wi-Fi network or a connection with a strict bandwidth limit.

The codec can use YUV 4:4:4 for more precise color data. Valve says the option may be useful when streaming a desktop or reading text on a 4K display, although it is disabled by default because it needs more bandwidth and processing time. HDR is selected automatically when both the host and client support it.

Where users can test Pyrowave

Pyrowave is currently available in the Steam beta on Windows and macOS. Linux users need to enable the experimental SteamRT3 Steam Client first. Valve says support for the Steam Link mobile app is coming soon.

The codec is experimental and does not guarantee lower latency on every setup. Total Remote Play latency includes the time needed for encoding, network transfer, decoding, and display. A faster codec cannot remove delays caused by a weak wireless connection or a slow display.

Valve developer Sam Lantinga also clarified that the feature is intended for flat-screen Remote Play. It is not a Steam Link VR feature.

How to enable Pyrowave in Steam

Pyrowave is not enabled by default. To test it on a desktop Steam client:

1. Open Steam Settings and go to Interface.
2. Choose Steam Beta Update under Client Beta Participation.
3. Restart Steam and install the beta update.
4. Open Settings again, go to Remote Play, and enable Advanced Client Options.
5. Turn on the Pyrowave option before starting a Remote Play session.

Linux and SteamOS users may need to select the experimental SteamRT3 client in the relevant system settings before the option appears. Users can also turn off automatic bitrate control and select a setting from 100 Mbit/s to 500 Mbit/s to match the stream to their wired network.

What Pyrowave changes for Remote Play

Pyrowave gives Remote Play an option for users who have more local network capacity than standard streaming codecs need. The extra bandwidth may help with latency-sensitive games and desktop streaming where compressed text can look soft.

The trade-off depends on the network. Users should test Pyrowave on their own setup, watch the Remote Play performance graph, and compare it with the standard codec. If the connection cannot sustain the extra traffic, Pyrowave may provide no improvement and can make the stream less stable.