



Digital Television Conversion

Introduction

If you own and watch TV, then you need to educate yourself about the upcoming digital television conversion, and make sure you are ready. Right now TV stations broadcast their programming two ways: analog and digital TV (DTV.) The government requires that after February 17, 2009 all full-power TV stations broadcast only in digital. This switch from analog to digital broadcast television is referred to as the “digital TV (DTV) transition.” Older televisions only pick up analog signals, so when the nation's broadcasters switch to digital transmission, analog televisions without cable or satellite service will stop receiving free, over-the-air television signals.

Do You Need To Take Action?

The type of TV you own is very important. People that use a rooftop antenna or “rabbit ears,” or watch over-the-air television on an analog TV will lose their signal on February 17, 2009. Many consumers will not have to do a thing. Households that subscribe to cable or satellite service for all their TV sets, or households with a new digital television, do not need to take any action.

- A digital television (a TV with an internal digital tuner) will allow you to continue to watch free over-the-air programming after February 17, 2009.
- If you subscribe to cable or satellite TV, and have an analog TV hooked up to cable or satellite service, you should not be affected.
- However, if you have an analog television (and do not subscribe to cable or satellite), you will need a digital-to-analog converter box to continue to watch broadcast television.

Why is Switching a Good Thing?

- By switching to all-digital broadcasting, parts of the “broadcast spectrum” will be free and available for public safety communications. Police, fire departments, and rescue squads will not experience communication problems such as those that occurred on September 11, 2001.
- Consumers will benefit because private companies will be able to buy some of the “spectrum,” and will be able to offer more advanced wireless services, more channels, and better picture quality.

The Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program

To help consumers with the transition, the government created this program, which is administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA.) Manufacturers have developed a digital-to-analog converter box that will allow viewers to continue using an analog TV. That means you do not need to get rid of your existing analog TV if you use a converter box.

- Each U.S. household is eligible to receive up to two coupons (available now), worth \$40 each, toward the purchase of eligible digital-to-analog converter boxes. Coupons are valid for eligible converter boxes sold at participating consumer electronics retailers, and must be used at the time of purchase. A box will cost between \$40-\$75.
- For more information on the Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program, visit NTIA's at www.ntia.doc.gov/dtvcoupon, or call 1-888-388-2009 or 1-877-530-2634 (TTY).
- The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is maintaining a list of eligible boxes at www.ntiadtvtv.gov/cecb_list.cfm

Seniors Should Know:

- There are Three Options for Consumers:
 1. **Get a digital-to-analog digital converter box.** The newly developed boxes sit on top of your television, changing the digital signal being broadcast to analog so your television can "read" it. Retail price is expected to be \$40-75, but government coupons worth \$40 are available now.
 2. **Get a "digital television" (with a built-in digital tuner.)** However, you do not need to get a "High Definition TV," which is different, and more expensive.
 3. **Get cable or satellite service.** Contact your provider to see what equipment you may need.
- These labels or markings are some of the words that indicate the TV has a digital tuner: "Integrated Digital Tuner," "Digital Tuner Built-In," "Digital Receiver," or "Digital Tuner," "DTV," "ATSC," or "HDTV" (High Definition television). If your television equipment contains any of these labels or markings, you should be able to view digital over-the-air programming without the need for a digital-to-analog converter box.
- Do not confuse the DTV transition with things like "high definition" or "flat screen" or other modern television features. The transition is only about how television broadcasts are delivered to your television set. You do not need to buy a HDTV to watch digital TV.
- If your television set is labeled as a "Digital Monitor" or "HDTV Monitor," or as "Digital Ready" or "HDTV Ready," this does not mean it actually contains a digital tuner. You will likely need a separate set-top box that contains a digital tuner to view over-the-air digital programming.
- If you want to get rid of your old analog TV, one resource is: <http://www.mygreenelectronics.org>

Tell Your Member of Congress

Congress needs to allocate more funds for digital television conversion consumer education and outreach. The total national budget for this transition is less than other countries spent in just one city during similar transitions abroad. Money needs to be available specifically for people that will need one-on-one help in making the transition. Seniors are particularly affected by this transition.

Opportunities in the Field

- Collect stories from seniors in the community about their personal experience with the transition: confusion over the process; fraud; difficulty accessing assistance. These stories are useful in making the case for increased funding and improved legislation for vulnerable populations.
- This is an opportunity for the Alliance to be a resource to senior communities; to partner with like-minded groups working to transition seniors to DTV. The Alliance can assist the community while gaining visibility as a non-partisan advocacy organization.
 - Connect with local groups and stakeholders (for example local broadcasters) that may have resources and interest in educating seniors in the community about the transition.
 - Consider spreading the word about DTV transition at local programs, tabling at events, or developing an installation assistance program with partners in the aging community.

Resources

- www.dtv.gov or 888-CALL-FCC (U.S. Federal Communications Commission)
- www.dtvtransition.org (DTV Transition Coalition)
- www.dtvanswers.com (National Association of Broadcasters)
- For specific information about the Converter Box Coupon Program: <http://www.dtv2009.gov> or 888-DTV-2009 (U.S. Dep. of Commerce, National Telecommunications & Info. Administration)
- For a fact sheet on installing a digital converter box: <http://content.ce.org/dtv/converterQSG.pdf> (Consumer Electronics Association)

