

Consumer Electronics Retailers Coalition



www.ceretailers.org

WHAT CONSUMERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE FEBRUARY 17, 2009 “DTV TRANSITION” AND THE NTIA “TV CONVERTER BOX COUPON PROGRAM”

(1) WHEN WILL THE TRANSITION FROM ANALOG TO DTV BROADCASTING OCCUR?

The last day that major full power local broadcasters can send out conventional “analog” television signals will be *February 17, 2009*. After that date, your major local television broadcasters will broadcast exclusively digital television (“DTV”) signals that can be received only by digital TVs or converters. *If you use a TV antenna with one or more TVs, you should consider what this means to you.*

(2) WHAT ABOUT “LOW POWER” OR “COMMUNITY” BROADCASTERS?

While the major commercial and public broadcasters are going all-digital by February 17, 2009, there are some specialized low power or “community” broadcasters that are not required to convert to digital in 2009. If you are accustomed to watching one of these stations, you will likely hear from *them* about how to maintain your viewing. *(As to your equipment options, see question #11.)*

(3) WHAT IS THE NTIA “TV CONVERTER BOX COUPON PROGRAM”?

Because many U.S. households still rely on antennas (indoor or outdoor) for all or some of their TV viewing, the Congress, when it enacted the DTV Transition law, set aside up to \$1.5 billion dollars to fund a “TV Converter Coupon Program” administered by the Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

Each consumer household can apply for up to two \$40 electronic coupons that can be used at participating retailers toward the purchase of coupon-eligible converter boxes that will convert digital TV broadcasts to analog signals that can be received by the older TVs.

- You can apply for these coupons **now** on-line at www.dtv2009.gov or by calling toll-free **1-888-DTV2009 (1-888-388-2009)**. The web site and the coupon packaging will also have information about the models of certified converters and the local and on-line or telephone service retailers who will accept the government-issued coupons.
- The coupons cannot be combined to buy a single product or to pay for sales tax or shipping. **Each coupon will expire 90 days from the date of issuance.** The deadline to apply for coupons is March 31, 2009.

(4) I NOW SUBSCRIBE TO CABLE OR SATELLITE – DO I NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT LOSING A TV SIGNAL TO MY TVs THAT ARE HOOKED UP TO THESE SERVICES?

No. Cable operators pick up most local broadcasts at a central location and send them to homes over cable; satellite services increasingly are able to do this as well. Through at

least 2012 **they will be required to provide the sort of free local broadcast programming they currently offer.**

- Local major broadcasters will be able to offer additional digital channels, some or all of which might not be carried, or carried in HDTV, by your service. If you want to see such *additional* channels, you would need an antenna, and your set would need an HDTV or DTV tuner built-in or added on via a converter. For local information, see www.antennaweb.org.
- In the future, cable operators might *also* move to “all digital” means of delivery, which *could mean that even for your TVs that are hooked up to cable, you would need to procure a “set top box” from your cable company* or have a TV with a *digital cable tuner* (such as one with a “CableCARD” slot) – but for most cable systems this is likely a future consideration.

(5) **DO I NEED A NEW ANTENNA?**

In many or most instances, your existing antenna should work fine, but there may be exceptions to this because the local area effective reception patterns for digital broadcasts might be somewhat different than for the same station’s analog signals.

- If you use an indoor antenna, the key part now will be the round or square element, not the “rabbit ears” part. With an indoor antenna it might take more trial and error to “find” a digital signal, as you will not see a “too weak” signal at all.
- If you use a rooftop antenna and are at the edges of a coverage area, you might need some adjustment or amplification to pull in all the signals that you want.
- While a Converter that offers “analog pass-through” has the advantages discussed in Question 11, below, such a Converter, or an external “splitter” or “A/B” switch, splits the signal path so may require some antenna adjustment to make up for a slight loss in signal strength. This could be reflected in your antenna needs.
- You can obtain an initial indication of your situation at www.antennaweb.org. Some retailers and antenna installers will be able to test for signal strength at your home to help assure that you pull in the stations that you want.

(6) **WHAT IS “DTV,” ANYWAY?**

While many signals are already sent and displayed digitally, the “transition” refers to the change in the broadcasting of local “over the air” TV (not cable or satellite), *as you receive it using a “rabbit ears” or roof-top antenna*. A tuner for a digital broadcast signal may be called a “DTV” tuner.

(7) WHAT IS “HDTV?”

HDTV (“High Definition Television”) is the highest quality version of digital television. Not all digital broadcast, cable, or satellite signals are in HDTV and not all “DTV” receivers can display HDTV. *Analog HDTV broadcasts in the U.S. are not possible.*

(8) DOES MY PRESENT TV HAVE A DTV TUNER? WHAT ABOUT MY VCR, DVD RECORDER, PVR, DVR, ETC.?

The only televisions that have DTV tuners are those that have been sold – since about 1998 – as having an “*integrated*” or “*built-in*” DTV or HDTV broadcast tuner. (An HD set sold as a “monitor” or “HD-ready” is capable of *displaying* HDTV but does *not* have a built-in HDTV tuner.)

- Newer TVs still have “analog” tuners (useful in receiving signals from cable and satellite boxes, game players, and low power TV stations), but they also have built-in DTV or HDTV tuners as well.
- There are very few if any “analog only” TVs left in stores, and these should be accompanied by the “Consumer Alert” label that is required by the FCC.

(9) I NOW RELY ON AN ANTENNA FOR AT LEAST ONE TV THAT DOES NOT HAVE A DTV TUNER. WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

- You could *subscribe to a cable, satellite, or other program delivery service* that carries the broadcast programming in which you are interested.
 - To continue to rely on an *antenna*, you will need an external *DTV Broadcast Converter product such as the Coupon-Eligible TV Converter Box*.
 - You could purchase a new digital television.
- If your set is an *HD Monitor* (sometimes called “*HD-ready*”) you are likely to want a tuner that can receive HDTV broadcasts in full HDTV resolution (rather than “*downconverting*” them to a lesser format). TV converter boxes that are coupon-eligible do not have HDTV outputs, so you may want a product that is not eligible for the coupon program.
- If your set is a regular analog television, you will likely want to obtain a TV Converter through the NTIA coupon program. You can apply for these coupons **now** on-line at www.dtv2009.gov/ or by calling **1-888-DTV2009 (1-888-388-2009)**.

(10) I SUBSCRIBE TO CABLE OR SATELLITE SERVICE, BUT NOT ALL MY TVs ARE HOOKED UP. WHAT DOES THE FEBRUARY 17, 2009 SHUTOFF OF THE MAJOR ANALOG CHANNELS MEAN TO ME?

- If some of your TVs rely on an *antenna*, you *will* need a converter box if they are not DTV sets. (As noted above, you might still want an antenna and a DTV or HDTV tuner in order to receive all local channels.)
- If a TV is not currently hooked up to an antenna (for example, it is being used to play video games, or to watch DVDs or camcorder movies, *etc.*), nothing will change, because only *free over the air broadcasts* will be affected by this DTV broadcast transition.

(11) I WATCH A LOW POWER “COMMUNITY” BROADCASTER THAT IS NOT REQUIRED TO CONVERT TO DIGITAL ON FEBRUARY 17, 2009, BUT I ALSO WATCH THE MAJOR STATIONS THAT WILL BE ALL-DIGITAL. HOW CAN I KEEP WATCHING BOTH ON MY “ANALOG” TV?

Some of the Converters listed with an * in NTIA information have an “analog pass-through” feature that facilitates switching of the antenna between your analog TV tuner and your coupon-eligible converter box.

- This “pass-through” feature is not mandatory in TV Converters because there is a tradeoff in slightly reduced signal strength due to the switching circuitry. This might or might not be a factor in your viewing location.
- Initially, only a few of the NTIA-certified Converters will have this “pass-through” option but additional Converter manufacturers and retailers may be adding this feature at the request of low power stations. If you are alerted that a station you watch is “low power” you may wish to check on the local or on-line availability of a “pass-through” Converter before applying for your coupon(s) from the NTIA.
 - Alternatively, you could use a non-pass-through Converter and buy an accessory kit to do the switching between it and your analog TV.

(12) IF I AM SHOPPING FOR A NEW TV, WHAT DOES THE FEBRUARY 17, 2009 SHUTOFF OF THE ANALOG CHANNELS MEAN TO ME?

Almost all TVs available in stores today will now have built-in digital and analog TV tuners, and the few that do not should be accompanied by “consumer alert” labels. However, stores also sell display products that are “monitors” that do not have *any* tuner at all. Monitors can only be used with converter boxes for broadcast, cable, satellite, and competing services; or with DVD players, game players, computers, *etc.*

(13) WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HDTV?

High Definition Television, or “HDTV,” is the more general name for showing video in a newer and better format – *a wider screen with about 5 times the picture information*. All types of video displays – conventional picture tubes, projection TVs, and Plasma or LCD “flat panels” – can show HDTV *if* they are designed to display this video information in this format. *You can expect a product to tune and display HDTV only if it was sold or advertised as such*. For more information go to www.DTV.gov.

- If your existing set is *not* HD-capable (an “**HDTV Monitor**” or “**HDTV**” television) it will not display an HDTV signal in full quality, even if it receives an HDTV signal from some other source.
- If your existing set *is* HD-capable it should display an HDTV quality picture from its own tuner or an external HDTV tuner (cable, satellite, broadcast, *etc.*) or disc or game player, but will display only a standard quality picture from a coupon-eligible converter box or other non-HD source.
- For an existing TV that cannot display an HDTV picture, your coupon-eligible converter box will *tune* the HDTV broadcast channels, but provide them to your set *in a standard quality format that your set can display*.
- For further information on display formats, see the Consumer Electronics Association’s HDTV Consumer Guide at <http://www.myceknowhow.com/digitalTelevision.cfm>.

(14) WHY WILL OVER-THE-AIR TV STATIONS STOP BROADCASTING ON THE “ANALOG” CHANNELS, ANYWAY?

After decades of study, Congress passed a law in late 2005 requiring this change. For more than half a century, TV broadcasts have used and improved on basic **analog** technology that was invented in the 1920s and 1930s. These signals take up a lot of radio “spectrum” that is now urgently needed for emergency communications and new **broadband** services. (Finding new frequencies for emergency communications became a high priority after September 11, 2001.)

Congress found that we can support these essential communications, and new digital services, by moving TV to much more efficient digital transmission, while offering *more* locally broadcast channels, plus HDTV programming, in less overall spectrum space.

- ❖ You can find out even more information by going to CERC’s website: www.CERetailers.org or the DTV Transition Coalition’s website: www.DTVTransition.org.

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