

Consumer Electronics Retailers Coalition



www.ceretailers.org



What you need to know
about the February 17, 2009
DTV Transition
and the
NTIA Coupon-Eligible
Converter Box Program

What you need to know about the February 17, 2009 DTV Transition and the NTIA Coupon-Eligible Converter Box Program



1. When will the transition from analog to DTV broadcasting occur?

The last day that local broadcasters can send out conventional “analog” television signals will be **February 17, 2009**. After that date, your 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. Why will over-the-air broadcasting stop on the analog channels?

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.

3. What is the NTIA “Coupon-Eligible Converter Box” (CECB) program?

Because millions of households rely on antennas 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 program of “Coupon-Eligible Converter Boxes,” to be administered by an agency of the Department of Commerce, the NTIA.

The law requires the NTIA to make available, to each household, up to two \$40 electronic coupons that can be used at participating retailers for “converter boxes” that will convert digital TV broadcasts to analog signals that can be received by the older conventional TVs.

These coupons will be available only from the NTIA, but applications to obtain them will be widely available.

The coupons cannot be combined to buy a single product. Coupons may be requested starting January 1, 2008, and will expire 90 days from issuance. The last coupons will be sent out by 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. ***It is likely that they will continue to provide whatever free local broadcast programming they currently provide to you, even after there is this change in broadcasters’ means of transmission.***

- However, local 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 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, you would need to lease a “set top box”*** or have a TV with a ***digital cable tuner*** (such as one with a “CableCARD” slot)—but this is likely a future, not a present, consideration.

5. What is “DTV” anyway?

Digital television or “DTV” as used in this program means the broadcasting of digital television by local TV (not cable or satellite) broadcasters, **as received directly by consumers using “rabbit ears” or roof-top antennas.** The signals are sent from local transmitters, over the air, to homes, by modern digital techniques rather than the older analog methods that are not as efficient and are of lower quality.

6. What is “HDTV”?

High Definition Television (“HDTV”) is the highest quality version of DTV. (There is “standard,” “enhanced,” and “HDTV.”) Not all DTV broadcasts are in HDTV and not all DTV receivers can display HDTV. **Analog HDTV broadcasts in the U.S. are not possible. If you have seen an HDTV broadcast, it has been over satellite, cable, another such service, or over a digital TV broadcast channel—these are already on the air.**

7. 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.)

The FCC now requires that most TVs with analog tuners also be marketed with built-in or separate DTV or HDTV tuners, and this will soon be a requirement for all TVs—so most of the TVs you see nowadays in stores will be DTV or HDTV “built-in” products. Be sure to check, however, just in case one is not.

8. I now rely on an antenna for at least one TV that does not have a DTV tuner. What are my other options?

You could **subscribe to a cable, satellite, or other program delivery service** that carries the broadcast programming in which you are interested. If you are already a cable, satellite, or other programming service subscriber, you might extend your hookup to reach this TV.

To continue to rely on an **antenna**, you will need an external **DTV Broadcast Converter product such as a Coupon-Eligible Converter Box.**

- If your set is an **HD Monitor** (sometimes called **“HD-ready”**) you are likely to want a tuner that can display HDTV broadcasts in full HDTV resolution (rather than **“downconverting”** them to a lesser format). Coupon-Eligible Converter Boxes will not have HDTV outputs, so you may want a non-subsidized product.
- If your set is a “standard” television, you will likely want to obtain a **Coupon-Eligible Converter Box** through the NTIA program. The NTIA, broadcasters, retailers, and others will be publishing information about how to obtain coupons, when the program starts in **2008**, to use toward the purchase of such products at retail and on-line stores. For up-to-date information, check at www.dtvtransition.org or www.ceretailers.org.

9. If I am shopping for a new TV, what does the February 17, 2009 shutoff of the analog channels mean to me?

If you plan to purchase a new TV that will rely on a roof-top or indoor **antenna**, you will want to make sure that it has a **built-in** (integrated) **HDTV or DTV tuner**. Even after DTV tuners are required in all new TVs, there will still be some products sold as “monitors” that do not have any tuner at all.

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 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 television 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.

(continued)

11. What else do I need to know about HDTV?

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

- If your existing set is *not* HD-capable (an “**HD Monitor**” or “**HD built-in**”) it will not display an HDTV signal in full quality, even if an “HDTV broadcast converter” is attached to it.
- If your existing set is *HD-capable* it should display an HDTV quality picture when an HDTV broadcast converter is attached (but will display only a standard quality picture from a “DTV Broadcast Converter” that is not advertised as HDTV).
- For your existing TV that **cannot handle HDTV**, a converter should tune the HDTV broadcast channels, but provide them to your set **in the standard quality format that your set can display.** (Some, but not all, of these might also provide HDTV-quality signals to “HD-ready” sets.)
- For further information on display formats, see the Consumer Electronics Association’s *Guide to Digital Television* at www.myceknowhow.com/digitalTelevision.cfm.

Consumer Electronics Retailers Coalition



www.ceretailers.org

For more information contact:

Robert Schwartz—CERC Legal Counsel
rschwartz@constantinecannon.com

or

Marc Pearl—CERC Executive Director
pearl@ceretailers.org

919 18th Street, NW—Suite 925 | Washington, DC 20006-5511
202 464 4000 | fax: 202 464 4001 | info@ceretailers.org