

Consumer Electronics Retailers Coalition



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CONGRESS HAS MADE CHANGES TO THE “DTV TRANSITION” AND THE NTIA “TV CONVERTER BOX COUPON PROGRAM”

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

Congress has extended the last day that full power local broadcasters can broadcast conventional “analog” television signals to **June 12, 2009**, but many have ended their analog broadcasts on the original shutoff date of February 17, 2009, and **additional stations are likely to end analog broadcasting some time between March 13 and June 12**. Accordingly, if you are not yet prepared, you should try to be ready as soon as is possible.

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

- To continue to rely on an *antenna* with your old analog TV, you will need a DTV broadcast converter such as a *TV Converter Box* that you can buy with aid of an NTIA Coupon.
 - Or, to continue to receive programs using an antenna, you could buy a **new television**. All new TVs have a digital tuner for over-the-air reception.
 - Or, you could *subscribe to a cable, satellite*, or other program delivery service that carries the broadcast programming in which you are interested.
- If your set is a regular analog television, you may want to obtain a TV Converter. You can apply for NTIA \$40 coupons on-line at www.dtv2009.gov/ or by calling **1-888-DTV2009 (1-888-388-2009)**.
- If you had a Coupon or Coupons and they expired before you could use them, those Coupons still may not be used, but *you may soon be eligible to apply for replacement Coupons*. We expect that information on how and when to apply will appear on www.dtv2009.gov/ and elsewhere.

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

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 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 shipping or to pay for sales tax. **Each coupon will expire 90 days from the date of issuance**. The new deadline to apply for coupons is July 31, 2009, or while supplies last.

(4) I NOW SUBSCRIBE TO CABLE OR SATELLITE – DO I NEED CONVERTERS FOR 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.** However –

- If some of your TVs are *not* hooked up to the subscription service, and *do* rely on an *antenna*, you *will* need to hook them up or get a converter box if they are not DTV sets.
- Some cable operators are *also* moving 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 try a TV with a digital cable tuner (whether a digital TV will be adequate for these systems is unclear at present – ask your local cable operator).

(5) MY NTIA CONVERTER COUPON IS EXPIRING, OR I CAN’T GET OUT TO STORES, AND I’M HAVING TROUBLE FINDING A CONVERTER – WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

- If you are going to use a Coupon, it is best to use one that you or a friend have now, rather than letting it expire and re-applying.
- The NTIA’s Coupon Program web site, at <https://www.DTV2009.gov/VendorSearch.aspx>, lists major national retailers that accept Coupons. The same web page also lists retailers (including Best Buy and RadioShack) that accept purchases with Converter Coupons by phone, and the toll-free numbers for each, and has links to retailers that accept Coupons on-line.
- Under program rules it is permissible to use a Coupon ordered by a friend (or a relative or a neighbor) or even to ask your friend to order a Coupon for your own use, provided that your friend’s household is still entitled to receive Coupons. The program does not require that you be the one who ordered the Coupon that you use, so long as it is valid and unexpired. So, in a store or on-line, YOU can use a Coupon ordered by a friend.

(6) DO I NEED A NEW ANTENNA?

In 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, in many cases the key part now will be the round or square “UHF” element, not the “rabbit ears” “VHF” part. You may need to adjust both parts of the antenna to receive all of your channels. With an indoor or rotating outdoor antenna it might take more trial and error to “find” a digital signal, as you will not see a “too weak” signal at all. Some new antenna models are on the market that might improve your reception if you are still having problems.
- If you use a rooftop antenna and are at the edges of a coverage area, you might need some adjustment or amplification to receive all the signals that you want.

- 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. The FCC has a tool that can help you determine the signals that you might potentially receive: <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/engineering/maps/>.
- Many stations making the transition to all-digital broadcasting will change broadcast frequencies. Therefore, *whether you are using a Converter or a television with a built-in digital tuner, you will need to do a “re-scan” of the channels whenever any local station ceases analog broadcasts*. This is easily done from the “menu,” or possibly using a button on your remote control.

(7) WHAT IS “DTV,” ANYWAY?

While many signals are already sent and displayed digitally, the “DTV 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, in either a TV or in a Converter or other product, may be called a “DTV” tuner.

(8) WHAT IS “HDTV?”

HDTV (“High Definition Television”) is the highest quality format for digital television. Not all digital broadcast, cable, or satellite signals are in HDTV and not all “DTV” receivers can display HDTV. *All High Definition transmissions require digital HDTV tuners.*

(9) DOES MY PRESENT TV HAVE A DTV TUNER?

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 all also have built-in DTV or HDTV tuners as well.
- If you can get digital TV channels (*e.g.*, channel 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 ...) using an antenna now, then your set is a digital TV (or an HDTV) and it will not need any Converter.

(10) WHAT ABOUT “LOW POWER” OR “COMMUNITY” BROADCASTERS? I WATCH A LOW POWER “COMMUNITY” BROADCASTER THAT IS NOT YET REQUIRED TO CONVERT TO DIGITAL, BUT I ALSO WATCH THE MAJOR STATIONS THAT WILL BE ALL-DIGITAL. HOW CAN I KEEP WATCHING BOTH ON MY “ANALOG” TV?

While the major commercial and public broadcasters are going all-digital between February 17, 2009, and June 12, 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. Today most 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. Alternatively, you could use a non-pass-through Converter and buy an accessory kit to do the switching between it and your analog TV.

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

All TVs available in stores today have built-in digital and analog TV tuners, if you find a few that do not they 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.*

(12) 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>.

(13) 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.

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