

Digital TV on Its Way – Prepare for the Switch to Get the Picture

Big changes are coming in television broadcasting. On February 17, 2009, all full power television stations are required to stop broadcasting in analog and continue broadcasting in digital only. This is known as the DTV transition.

Some consumers are asking why they need to switch. First, all-digital broadcasting will give needed communications channels to police, fire and emergency rescue personnel. It will also allow for new wireless services for consumers. In addition, since digital is more efficient than analog, it allows stations to broadcast several programs at the same time, instead of just one program with analog. This means broadcasters can offer consumers more choices. Digital also allows broadcasters to offer improved picture and sound quality, including high definition (HDTV) programming.

It is also important to know that the end of analog broadcasting does not mean that consumers must purchase new TVs, and you certainly don't need an HDTV to watch digital broadcasts. If you currently receive over-the-air programming on an analog television using a broadcast antenna, either through "rabbit ears" on your set or an antenna on your roof, you will only need a digital-to-analog converter box to continue watching broadcast television on that set after February 17, 2009. These boxes will cost approximately \$40 to \$70, and will be available in stores beginning in early 2008.

To help defray the cost of digital-to-analog converter boxes, each U.S. household can request up to two coupons, worth \$40 each, to be used toward the purchase of eligible boxes. This coupon program is being administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). For more information on the coupon program visit www.dtv2009.gov or call 1-888-DTV-2009.

If you watch over-the-air programming on a DTV (a TV with a built-in digital tuner), you will not need a digital-to-analog converter box. Also, an antenna you use to receive analog broadcasts should work for receiving digital broadcasts, both on a DTV and on an analog TV connected to a digital-to-analog converter box.

If you subscribe to a paid television service such as cable or satellite TV, you will not need a digital-to-analog converter box, and the TVs connected to your paid service will continue to receive local broadcast programming. However, consumers are advised to check with their providers to see if they will need any additional equipment in the future.

For more information, call the FCC at 1-888-225-5322 (TTY: 1-888-835-5322) or visit their DTV Web site at www.dtv.gov.