



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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30 DAYS AND COUNTING TO DTV TRANSITION: FCC CONCENTRATES ON PREPARING CONSUMERS FOR JUNE 12 DEADLINE

WASHINGTON, DC – With only 30 days left before the nationwide digital television (DTV) transition, the Federal Communications Commission is gearing up its ongoing consumer assistance efforts for a final push to make sure consumers are prepared for the end of analog broadcast service. On June 12, all full-power television stations in the United States will cease analog transmission and broadcast only in digital. Consumers who use an antenna to get free, over-the-air programming could lose their television signals on June 12 if they haven't taken steps to make their televisions DTV-ready.

“The switch to DTV offers benefits to consumers and society but we must be vigilant to make sure all Americans are prepared for the transition,” said Acting FCC Chairman Michael Cops. “Television is a primary source for news, weather and public safety information for many Americans so the FCC is working overtime to reach those remaining viewers who still have not taken the necessary action to continue to receive television programming after June 12. Consumers should know that help is available through a wide range of sources – including the phone, the Internet, walk-in centers and clinics, and in-home assistance.”

More than a third of the country's full-power broadcast stations already have ceased analog broadcasts and now provide service only in digital, but June 12 is the deadline for all stations to do so. Consumers who do not subscribe to pay television services and have older, analog televisions will need to attach digital-to-analog converter boxes to their televisions in order to continue receiving television programming. They also may need to adjust or replace their antennas. According to a Nielsen survey, 3.5 million households – 3.1 percent of U.S. households with TVs -- were still “completely unready” for the transition to DTV as of April 26.

The Commission at its open meeting today outlined a wide-ranging outreach plan for the remaining 30 days before the June 12 deadline. As it has done in the past, the FCC will give special attention to six groups that the Commission has targeted as particularly in need of help. They include low-income individuals, minority communities, non-English speaking consumers, senior citizens, consumers with disabilities and individuals living in rural areas or tribal lands.

Among the many activities in the Commission's action plan:

- About 180 FCC employees have been dispatched to communities in 49 markets that are home to the greatest concentrations of unprepared households. FCC staff members are working with local governments and community-based organizations to get the word out on DTV preparedness and educate consumers on how to get ready. FCC commissioners also are speaking and answering questions about the digital transition at events such as town hall meetings and community gatherings.
- The Commission has revamped its DTV website, www.dtv.gov, to make it more useful to consumers and easier to use. The updated site gives consumers help and information specific to their communities on a variety of topics. By entering their zip codes in a search box, consumers can locate nearby support centers, get contact information for local stations and find DTV events near them. Information on sources of assistance is being updated daily. Online reception maps will show consumers what stations they should be able to receive at their home address once the transition is complete, information that can be useful in choosing and installing an antenna.
- The FCC so far has issued 12 grass roots contracts to establish up to 400 walk-in centers and 12,000 DTV help clinics across the country to offer consumers hands-on assistance on how to connect and operate converter boxes, help in ordering converter box coupons and other services.
- The Commission has awarded 34 contracts for free, in-home technical assistance for consumers having trouble installing their converter boxes and adjusting their antennas for digital signals. The Commission expects to issue several more contracts within the next week, resulting in a group of contractors capable of providing up to 218,700 installations across the country. Joining FCC contractors in this effort are two valuable volunteer partners – members of AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps and fire fighters in cooperation with the International Association of Fire Chiefs. Consumers can request such “house calls” by dialing 1-888-CALL-FCC.
- Operators at the FCC’s national DTV help line, 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322), can troubleshoot common converter box or antenna installation problems and will refer consumers to groups providing in-home installation if more assistance is needed. Several hundred operators are now working seven days a week, and their numbers will increase to as many as 4,000 as the June 12 deadline nears.
- The Commission has teamed with Consumers Union to distribute a consumer guide, written by CU’s Consumer Reports, that provides clear instructions and diagrams to help viewers prepare for the transition. “DTV Made Easy,” a 15-page booklet, can be downloaded from www.dtv.gov or obtained by calling the FCC’s DTV help line, 1-888-CALL-FCC. It also will be available at DTV walk-in help centers and mobile clinics throughout much of the country, from in-home installation helpers, and from major retailers.
- The FCC has called upon television broadcasters nationwide to conduct a “soft test” at three different times on May 21, when analog programming will be interrupted with a special message telling viewers that if they are seeing the message, it means they are not prepared to receive a digital signal and will lose reception on June 12 if they don’t take action.

- The FCC will launch a “home stretch” communications campaign coinciding with the May 21 “soft test,” which could include new Public Service Announcements, localized media announcements and interviews and grassroots educational literature distribution.

The digital TV transition benefits consumers by delivering better picture quality and sound, more channels and more programs. It benefits society by freeing airwaves for use by first responders, leading to more seamless communications between police, fire and other emergency services. It also opens spectrum for popular advanced mobile communications services such as wireless broadband.

Coupons worth \$40 toward purchase of a converter box can be obtained from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration by visiting www.dtv2009.gov or calling 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009). Each household is entitled to coupons for up to two boxes. Consumers can continue to order converter box coupons through July 31, 2009. For the latest information on the transition, please visit www.dtv.gov, or call the DTV help line at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322).

News about the Federal Communications Commission can also be found on the Commission’s website www.fcc.gov

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