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Gutierrez Announces Nursing Homes Residents and P.O. Box Households Eligible to Receive Converter Box Coupons

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WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez announced today that residents of licensed nursing homes, intermediate care facilities, assisted living facilities and households that use a post office box for mail delivery will be eligible to request coupons from the TV Converter Box Coupon Program. The rule change takes effect 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

"Allowing nursing home residents and households who rely on a post office box for their mail to request coupons helps those most in need to make the switch to digital television," Gutierrez said. "Ensuring that no one is left behind is our top priority and I encourage those who need a coupon to apply soon, and buy a converter box when their coupon arrives in the mail."

Applicants living in licensed nursing homes, intermediate care facilities and assisted living facilities will be required to provide their name, address of the facility and whether they receive television exclusively with an antenna, or through cable, satellite or other pay television service. A family member or a representative from the licensed facility may apply for one coupon for a nursing home resident, but the coupon will be mailed directly to the nursing home resident. A special application will be made available for nursing home residents to fill out once the rule becomes effective.

Also, applicants who utilize a post office box for mail delivery will be able to request two coupons through the normal application process. Applicants will be required to provide their physical residence in addition to their post office box number.

To address the possibility of waste, fraud and abuse, the Coupon Program will be vigilant and will deny applications that appear to be fraudulent. The address of each applicant will be checked against a third-party database to assist in validating eligibility.

Background

The Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 requires full-power television stations to cease analog broadcasts and switch to digital after February 17, 2009. The Act authorizes Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to create the TV Converter Box Coupon Program, which is funded by the \$19 billion airwaves auction and not tax dollars. Digital broadcast television offers consumers a clearer picture, more programming choices and will free up the airwaves for better communications among emergency first responders and new telecommunications services.

Consumers receiving free, over-the-air television on analog televisions will need to act to ensure their televisions continue to work when full power television stations go all-digital. Viewers of over-the-air television need to look at each analog set in their home that is not connected to cable, satellite or other pay television service and make a timely decision. They can connect their television to cable, satellite or pay television service; they can replace it with a digital TV; or they may keep it working with a TV converter box.

For consumers choosing the converter box option, the TV Converter Box Coupon Program permits all households to request up to two coupons - each worth \$40 - toward the purchase of certified converter boxes. Coupons may be requested until March 31, 2009, or while supplies last. Consumers can purchase a converter box at one of the more than 29,000 participating local, phone or online retailers. Coupon applications can take several weeks to process and mail so consumers opting to purchase a converter box should act now, and should call stores before shopping to ensure the desired converter box is available. Converter boxes generally cost between \$45 and \$80 and coupons expire 90 days from the date they are mailed.

Some viewers watch programs over translators or other low-power stations which may continue broadcasting analog signals after February 17, 2009. Those viewers may wish to select a converter box that will pass through analog signals.

Households, not including nursing home residents and P.O. Box applicants, may apply now for coupons online at www.DTV2009.gov, by phone at 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), via fax at 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632) or by mail to P.O. Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000. Deaf or hard of hearing callers may dial 1-877-530-2634 (English TTY) or 1-866-495-1161 (Spanish TTY). Consumers will receive a list of eligible converter boxes and participating retailers with their coupons. Coupons expire 90 days after they are mailed, and only one coupon can be used to purchase each coupon-eligible converter box.

For more information about the Coupon Program, please visit www.DTV2009.gov and for questions about the DTV transition, go to www.dtv.gov or call 1-888-CALL-FCC.