

Consumer Electronics Retailers Coalition



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# What you need to know about the February 17, 2009 “DTV Transition”

## Questions & Answers

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

The Congress has now passed legislation requiring all conventional “analog” TV broadcasting to stop on **February 17, 2009**. After that date, your local television broadcasters will be making only “DTV” broadcasts. **If received via an antenna** these broadcasts will require different TV tuners.

### 2. What is “DTV?”

DTV stands for “digital television,” or, in this case, the *broadcasting* of digital television by local TV broadcasters. **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.**

### 3. What is “HDTV?”

HDTV (short for High Definition Television) is the highest quality form of DTV. Not all DTV broadcasts are in HDTV and not all DTV receivers can display HDTV. **Broadcasts in HDTV are available only on DTV broadcast channels—they are not available over analog broadcast channels.** (HDTV is also available from cable, satellite, and other services.)

### 4. Will there be any charge to receive these digital channels?

No, broadcasts that are now free (or advertiser-supported) to consumers who receive them via antennas are **expected to remain free**. (It is possible that additional “pay” services may be launched in the future, but these are not expected to replace the free services offered today.)

### 5. Why must over-the-air broadcasting stop on the “analog” channels?

For more than half a century, TV broadcasts have used the technology that was invented in the 1920s and 1930s, and refined (by adding color) in the 1950s. In 1997, when broadcasters became interested in HDTV, and in order to find additional space for emergency communications and advanced services, the Congress decided that it was time for TV broadcasting to move to more modern and efficient “digital” techniques, which allow broadcasters to offer more channels to viewers. **So, Congress instructed the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) to assign to broadcasters new and different “DTV” channels and, after a “DTV Transition” period, to have the broadcasters return their old analog channels.**

- The frequencies used for the old “analog” channels will be re-assigned for other uses through an “auction.” **Holding an auction for these frequencies will free up space for new “broadband” and other communication services, and will help emergency responders to coordinate their communications.** (Finding new frequencies for emergency communications became a high priority after September 11, 2001.)

### 6. I now subscribe to cable or satellite—Do I need to be concerned about the end to free, over-the-air analog broadcasts?

You will probably not notice much change for those TVs hooked up to your cable or satellite service, but you might be missing out on some opportunities. 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:

- If you have TVs in your house that are **not hooked up** to your cable or satellite service, and rely on an **antenna** to receive conventional broadcasts, you will need to make alternative arrangements to keep watching these TVs.
- In the future, cable operators might *also* move to “all digital” means of delivery, which **could mean you would need to lease a “set-top box”** or own a TV with a digital cable tuner (such as one with a “CableCARD” slot) to continue to receive the channels you now view on a conventional TV.
- If a local broadcaster launches several new digital channels, a cable, satellite, or other programming service **operator might not agree, or be required, to carry all of their local channels, or to carry them in HDTV.** You might, therefore, need a DTV or HDTV tuner and an **antenna** in order to receive those channels.

## 7. Does my TV have a DTV tuner? What about my VCR, DVD recorder, PVR, DVR, etc.?

Most of the televisions that have DTV tuners are those that have been sold — since about 1998 — as having an “**integrated**” HDTV broadcast tuner. Most of these products are also capable of displaying HDTV, so they are sometimes advertised or sold as “**HD Built-in.**” (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 any larger TVs with “analog” tuners also be marketed with built-in or separate DTV tuners, and this will soon be a requirement for all TVs— so you should be seeing more and more “integrated” or “built-in” products in stores. (Some of these may be “DTV” or “EDTV” sets that cannot display full HDTV.)

- Separate **HDTV broadcast tuner products** have been available for several years. (You are likely to know if you have one.) Now that the Congress has passed its “transition” legislation, you can expect to see “**DTV Broadcast Converter**” products that, when hooked up to an **antenna**, convert the new digital broadcast signal to an old analog signal that your older TV can tune and display.
- Most VCRs, DVD recorders, personal video recorders (“PVRs”) and digital video recorders (“DVRs”) **do not presently have HDTV or DTV broadcast tuners, even though they may record by digital means.** (However,

if one of these products has a slot for a “CableCARD,” it does have an HDTV or DTV broadcast tuner.) “**DVRs**” provided by cable operators **do not** have digital broadcast tuners (cable operators use a different means to transmit digital signals), but some provided by satellite operators do. The considerations for supporting these non-TV products are similar to those for your present TVs.

## 8. 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 may want to make sure that it has a **built-in** (integrated) **HDTV or DTV tuner.** In fact, FCC rules *require* that by March 1, 2007, any TV produced with an analog broadcast tuner **must also have a DTV broadcast tuner** built-in or marketed to retailers with the set. (“Monitors,” however, such as those used with computers, need not have *any* tuner.) One bonus: Many of these “built-in” sets also have slots for **CableCARDS** which, when provided by your cable operator, **allow you to tune premium cable channels (including HDTV channels) without needing a set-top box.** This gives you an additional choice if, in the future, you might plan to subscribe to a cable service.

- If your new set is going to be hooked up to a cable, satellite, or telephone company video programming service instead of to an antenna, you may not need a DTV broadcast tuner. You can expect to receive all of the broadcast channels that you are accustomed to watching **if they are carried by this operator.** However:
  - If these broadcast channels are not carried, or are not carried in full HDTV resolution, you will need an **antenna to get the remaining local channels,** and your set would need an HDTV or DTV tuner built-in or added on (depending on whether the channels you want include HDTV broadcasts and whether your set can display HDTV). *For local information, see [www.antennaweb.org](http://www.antennaweb.org).*
  - You may in the future need to **lease a set-top box** from your cable, satellite, or telephone company, particularly if your new set does not accept a CableCARD. (continued)

## 9. In watching the TVs now in my home that are *not* connected to a cable or satellite service, what does the February 17, 2009 shutoff of the analog channels mean to me?

If your 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. If your existing TV currently relies on an antenna to receive free broadcast programming (and it does not have an “integrated DTV tuner”), you will have several 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 can extend your hookup to reach this TV.
- To continue to rely on an **antenna**, you will need an external **“DTV Broadcast Converter” product**.
  - If your set is an **HD Monitor** (sometimes called **“HD-ready”**) you will want a tuner that can display HDTV broadcasts in full HDTV resolution (rather than “downconverting” them to a lesser format).
  - If your set is a “standard” television, you will want to obtain a **“DTV Broadcast Converter”** product that converts a “DTV” or “HDTV” broadcast to a standard “analog” output that your TV can receive — either as “channel 3 or 4” or one of the other standard inputs that your TV already has. **The Congress has provided funds to assist consumers, from January 1, 2008 through March 31, 2009, in obtaining these converters via “coupons” (no more than two per household, \$40 per purchased product) that can be applied to their price. Additional details are not yet available.**

## 10. 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 the new “flat panels” — can show HDTV if they are designed to handle all of this video information in the new 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 “DTV Broadcast 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.)

## 11. What is “EDTV?”

Enhanced Definition Television, or “EDTV,” refers to the capability of displays to show pictures at about the same quality level as DVDs — better than pictures from standard analog broadcasts, but not of the same quality as an HDTV display. For such a set, you might get better performance from a broadcast converter product that has enhanced capabilities as well. For further information on display formats, see the FCC’s DTV site at <http://www.dtv.gov/whatisdtv.html>.

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