

Wilmington, North Carolina Area Digital Transition: New Hanover, Brunswick, Pender, Bladen, and Columbus Counties

First in Flight, First in Digital

The DTV Transition and LPTV/Class A/Translator Stations

FCC

Consumer Advisory

The digital television (DTV) transition refers to the switch from analog to digital broadcast television. While the national DTV transition will be on February 17, 2009, **the Wilmington, North Carolina area will transition at 12 noon on September 8, 2008.** After that date, full-power commercial TV stations will only broadcast in digital. While the majority of consumers in the U.S. can receive the programming of full-power over-the-air stations, there are three other categories of broadcast TV stations – “low-power,” “Class A,” and “translator” stations. There is currently no statutory deadline for these stations to convert to digital broadcasting.

The FCC established low-power television (LPTV) service in 1982 to provide opportunities for locally-oriented television service in small communities. These communities may be in rural areas or may be individual communities within larger urban areas. More than 2,100 licensed LPTV stations are in operation. LPTV programming can include satellite-delivered programming services, syndicated programs, movies, and a wide range of locally-produced programs.

Class A TV stations are former LPTV stations that have certain interference protection rights not available to LPTV stations. These stations are technically similar to LPTV stations, but unlike LPTV stations must air at least three hours of locally-produced programming each week and comply with most of the non-technical regulations applicable to full-power stations. Approximately 600 licensed Class A TV stations are in operation.

A TV translator station rebroadcasts the programs of a full-power TV broadcast station. TV translator stations typically serve communities that cannot receive the signals of free over-the-air TV stations because they are too far away from a full-power TV station or because of geography (such as uneven terrain or mountains). Many of the 4,700 licensed TV translator stations operate in mountainous or more remote areas of the country.

There are several ways to determine whether the broadcast stations you view over-the-air (with a rooftop antenna or "rabbit ears" attached to your TV) are LPTV, Class A or TV translator stations. Class A stations are required to visually or aurally identify their stations with their community of license and call sign (that includes the suffix “-CA” for Class A) at sign on, sign off, and on an hourly basis. LPTV stations also must regularly identify their station call sign. When locally originating programming, they must visually or aurally identify their call sign and community of license at sign on, sign off, and hourly. LPTV call signs may consist of four letters followed by the suffix “-LP” (for low power) or, alternatively, five characters beginning with the letters K or W followed by two numbers (their operating channel) and two additional letters.

Also, some TV translators are identified by the full-power TV stations whose signals they rebroadcast. Further, LPTV, Class A, and TV translator stations may regularly broadcast information as to their status, and may include information regarding the DTV transition.



While the February 17, 2009 deadline for ending analog broadcasts does not apply to low-power, Class A, and TV translator stations, the FCC will require these stations to convert to digital broadcasting sometime thereafter. More than 2,100 of these stations have been authorized to construct digital facilities and some are broadcasting in digital already. The FCC is currently considering the remaining issues involved with the low-power digital transition and will make decisions regarding these stations in the future.

If you have an analog-only television that receives free over-the-air programming (with a roof-top antenna or "rabbit ears" on the TV), you will need to purchase a digital-to-analog converter box in order to watch digital broadcast television. Each U.S. household is eligible to receive two \$40 coupons to be used toward the purchase of two digital-to-analog converter boxes. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is administering the coupon program. (Please note that these coupons will expire 90 days after mailing). More information can be found at www.dtv2009.gov, or by calling 1-888-388-2009 (voice) or 1-877-530-2634 (TTY).

If you purchase a digital-to-analog converter box to watch digital broadcasts on an analog TV and also wish to continue watching analog LPTV, Class A, or TV translator stations, you should purchase a converter box with "analog pass-through" capability, which allows analog broadcast signals to pass through the converter box to be tuned by your analog TV. NTIA's TV Converter Box Coupon Program has certified converter box models that have analog pass-through capability. A current list of coupon-eligible converter boxes is available at www.ntia.doc.gov/dtvcoupon/cecb_list.html. The converter box models that have analog pass-through capability are noted on the list with an asterisk next to them. In addition, NTIA will mail a list of current coupon-eligible converter boxes, noting with an asterisk those that have analog pass-through capability, to each household that receives converter box coupons. You can also check with your retailer to determine whether the converter box you are purchasing has analog pass-through capability.

If you purchase a digital-to-analog converter box without analog pass-through capability, you may have to connect an antenna switch or a signal "splitter" to bypass the box if you wish to view analog TV broadcasts. Check with the manufacturer of the digital-to-analog converter box and your retailer if you need instructions on how to connect the box to view broadcasts from both analog and digital stations.

For more information about the DTV transition, go to www.dtv.gov/wilmington or contact the FCC by e-mailing dtvinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-877-DTV-0908 (1-877-388-0908) voice or 1-866-644-0908 TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554.

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