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# THE DIGITAL TV TRANSITION

## What You Need To Know About DTV

### DTV and Cable Subscribers

On February 17, 2009, television in the United States is going to change. All full-power broadcast stations will stop broadcasting their signals in an analog format and will broadcast in digital only. The digital television (DTV) transition has many benefits. It will free up frequencies for police, fire, and emergency rescue communications, provide frequencies for advanced wireless services, and allow TV broadcast stations to offer more programming with better picture and sound quality.

It's important to know that the February 17, 2009 deadline for the digital television transition only applies to full-power broadcast stations – stations that use the public airwaves to transmit their programming for free to viewers through a broadcast antenna. Cable companies are not required by the government to switch their privately-owned systems from analog service to digital service. Cable companies are actually required by FCC rules to continue offering local broadcast stations to their customers in analog as long as they offer any analog service. This requirement will continue for at least three years after February 17, 2009. This means that customers who receive analog cable service (without a cable set-top box) will be able to continue to do so.

However, for business reasons (among other things, digital is much more efficient than analog), cable companies may decide to transition their systems from analog delivery to digital delivery. Your cable company may decide to move certain cable channels off of its analog service tier and onto a digital service tier, or it may decide to switch to all-digital service at once, so that there is no analog service tier for any subscribers. If your cable company decides to move some or all of the channels it provides onto a digital service tier, it may notify you that you need to get “digital cable” equipment to continue receiving that cable service. This may include renting or purchasing a cable set-top box or purchasing a digital cable ready TV equipped with a “CableCARD” slot. If you have a digital TV, you may be able to view broadcast stations through your cable system without additional equipment. You should ask your cable company about the equipment options that may be available to you, including any options to purchase equipment from a retailer if you do not wish to rent equipment from your cable company.

It is also important to know that a cable set-top box is different from a digital-to-analog converter box. A digital-to-analog converter box is necessary only for analog televisions that receive their programming over-the-air using a rooftop antenna or rabbit ears connected to the set. A digital-to-analog converter box is not necessary for a TV connected to a paid television service such as cable or satellite TV. In addition, “digital cable” and high definition programming on cable are not the same. If you want to receive HDTV programming through your cable provider, you will need to subscribe to your cable provider's HDTV package and view the programming on an HDTV set. You may also need a cable set-top box or other equipment to view HDTV programming.

### For More Information:

1-888-CALL-FCC (Voice)

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To summarize, if you are a cable subscriber, you should be aware that:

- The digital (DTV) transition applies only to full-power TV broadcast stations. It refers to the switch from analog to digital broadcast television.
- The DTV transition does not require cable companies to switch their cable systems to digital.
- For voluntary business reasons, your cable company may decide to move some cable channels from its analog tier onto a digital tier, or may switch to all-digital service and stop providing any analog service. This is not required by the government.
- As long as your cable company offers any analog service, it must provide you with your local broadcast stations so you can watch them without a cable set-top box.
- Check with your cable provider and ensure that you have the proper equipment if you are interested in receiving HDTV programming from your cable provider.

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