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THE DIGITAL TV TRANSITION

What You Need To Know About DTV

DTV and People with Disabilities

The transition from analog to digital television broadcasting will be historic. After February 17, 2009, the country's full power broadcast television stations will stop broadcasting in analog and broadcast exclusively in digital, as mandated by Congress in the Digital Television and Public Safety Act of 2005.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is continuing a multi-faceted approach to informing people with disabilities about the DTV transition. The approach includes DTV workshops dedicated to issues facing people with disabilities, collaboration with disability advocacy groups and outreach organizations, and the publication of educational materials and advisories for people with disabilities.

Consumers who receive their local broadcast stations through a paid provider such as cable or satellite TV are already prepared for the DTV transition. Consumers who rely on free, over-the-air television programming by using rooftop antennas or "rabbit ears" on their sets have two choices to be ready for the DTV transition: (1) they can purchase a digital television (a TV with a built-in digital tuner) or (2) they can purchase a digital-to-analog converter box for each of their analog TVs so they can continue to receive free, over-the-air programming on them.

Closed Captioning

Some consumers have expressed concern about how the digital-to-analog converter boxes will work and whether consumers will continue to receive closed captions after the transition to digital television. FCC rules require digital-to-analog converter boxes to either pass through available analog captions or generate their own digital captions if the programming is captioned. Below is some information about closed captioning and digital broadcasting:

Digital-to-analog converter boxes used with analog TVs:

- If you are able to see closed captions on your analog TV as white text on black background before attaching the digital-to-analog converter box, you will be able to see closed captions the same way after attaching the converter box.
- Analog TVs manufactured after June 1993, with screens 13 inches or larger measured diagonally, will be able to display available analog captions when a digital-to-analog converter box is installed. Smaller or older analog TVs are not required to display closed captions. However, you may be able to see closed

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captions on these TVs if the digital-to-analog converter box is equipped to generate closed captions.

- Some (not all) digital-to-analog converter boxes can generate and display digital closed captions. To determine whether a converter box is equipped to generate and display digital closed captions, ask the retailer to check the user manual that comes with the converter box.

Digital TVs:

- Digital TVs manufactured after June 2002, with screens 13 inches or larger measured diagonally, must be able to display closed captions. You will not need a digital-to-analog converter box to watch broadcast programming with an antenna for these TV sets.
- Digital TVs allow consumers to change the caption size, font (style), caption color, background color, and opacity.

Paid television services (such as cable or satellite TV):

- Some televisions (such as “cable ready” TVs) are connected directly to a paid TV provider and do not require a set-top box. Follow the instructions that came with the television and turn closed captions on/off through the television or with the remote control that came with the television.
- Some televisions are connected to a paid TV provider through a set-top box. (Note that a set-top box that receives signals from a paid provider is different from the digital-to-analog converter boxes needed for free, over-the-air broadcast television discussed above). To determine whether a paid television service set-top box is equipped to generate digital closed captions, ask your provider or check the user manual for your set-top box. To activate digital closed captions and to control the appearance of these captions, follow the instructions for the set-top box or television.

You can get more information on closed captioning from the following FCC consumer advisories:

- www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/dtvcaptions.html
- www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/CC_converters.html

Questions about closed captioning also may be sent to the FCC’s dedicated closed captioning email box at closedcaptioning@fcc.gov.

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Video Description Services

Some programming has contained video descriptions for a number of years. At present, video descriptions are available through the secondary audio programming (SAP) channel on an analog stereo TV set or VCR.

In July 2000, the FCC adopted rules to make television more accessible to people with vision disabilities by mandating that a certain amount of programming contain video description. These rules took effect in April 2002, but were vacated by a federal court in November 2002. As a result, video description is not required. Nevertheless, some programming providers voluntarily continue to provide video descriptions. Also, the requirement in Section 79.2 of the FCC's rules that emergency information provided on television be accessible to individuals who have vision disabilities is still in place. This means that broadcasters must orally describe any emergency information that is shown on the screen (e.g., weather map showing tornadoes) during regular or special newscasts, and must accompany any emergency information that is presented in a crawl or scroll with an aural tone which instructs individuals with vision disabilities to turn to a radio or another source for more information.

With digital television, broadcasters have more audio channels on which to provide video description. Because digital television encodes audio in a different manner than the encoding used in analog television, digital television does not utilize a SAP channel to transmit video descriptions. The digital television standards provide for two types of main audio service and six types of associated services, including associated services for people with vision disabilities. The standards also permit the transmission of secondary language programming. So while there was one option under the old analog TV service (*i.e.*, the SAP channel), broadcasters now have more audio channels to provide this voluntary service. However, inserting video descriptions into digital programming that was not created by the distributor may involve additional expense for broadcasters. For this reason, consumers should contact their local broadcasters to determine whether video description is offered.

Televisions with digital tuners should be able to process the audio services associated with the digital TV signals through functions that are built into their systems. Consumers should confirm with the manufacturer, owner's manual or retailer prior to purchase to determine if this feature is included in the digital TV. For consumers who will be using a digital-to-analog converter box to receive digital over-the-air television signals on an analog television, some of the digital-to-analog converter boxes that have been approved for NTIA coupon eligibility are capable of processing the associated audio services that are broadcast by a digital television station.

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Consumers using cable or satellite services should ask for additional information about the availability of video description from their service providers. To the extent that cable systems, satellite systems or other multi-channel video programming distributors receive programming with video description, those video descriptions should be delivered to the consumer.

You can get more information on video descriptions from the following FCC consumer advisory: www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/dtvvideodescription.html.

Additional Publications

The FCC website, www.dtv.gov, features a DTV educational video in American Sign Language for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Also, the FCC's most commonly utilized publications are available in Braille and audio format and all fact sheets and advisories are available in large print.

For more information on the DTV transition, call us at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) or by TTY at 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322), e-mail us at DTVinfo@fcc.gov, or visit our website at www.dtv.gov.

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