



Highlights of [GAO-08-510](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005, requires all full-power television stations in the United States to cease analog broadcasting by February 17, 2009, known as the digital television (DTV) transition. Prior to the transition date, the television broadcast industry must take a series of actions to ensure that over-the-air programming will continue to be available to television households once the transition is complete. For example, broadcast stations must obtain, install, and test the necessary equipment needed to finalize their digital facilities, and some stations will need to coordinate the movement of channels on the day the analog signal ceases transmission. This requested report examines (1) the status of broadcast stations in transitioning to digital, (2) the extent to which broadcast stations are encountering issues, and (3) the actions the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has taken to guide broadcasters in the digital transition. To address these issues, GAO conducted a Web-based survey of full-power television broadcast stations. GAO surveyed 1,682 stations and obtained completed questionnaires from 1,122 stations, for a response rate of 66.7 percent. GAO also reviewed legal, agency, and industry documents and interviewed public, private, and other stakeholders.

We provided FCC with a draft of this report, and FCC provided technical comments that we incorporated where appropriate.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-510](#). To view the results of GAO's survey, click on [GAO-08-528SP](#). For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldstein@gao.gov.

DIGITAL TELEVISION TRANSITION

Majority of Broadcasters Are Prepared for the DTV Transition, but Some Technical and Coordination Issues Remain

What GAO Found

Television broadcast stations have made substantial progress in transitioning to digital television, with the vast majority already transmitting a digital signal. Approximately 91 percent of the 1,122 full-power stations responding to our survey are currently transmitting a digital signal, with approximately 68 percent of survey respondents transmitting their digital signal at full strength and 68 percent transmitting their digital signal on the channel from which they will broadcast after the transition date. However, some stations still need to complete construction of their final digital facilities, and others need to relocate their digital channel to complete the transition. For example, 23 percent of survey respondents indicated they will be moving their digital channel to their analog channel. In addition, other stations need to move to a completely new channel. While almost all full-power stations are already broadcasting a digital signal, 9 percent of stations responding to our survey indicated that they are not currently broadcasting digitally. Almost all of these stations, however, indicated that they plan to have their digital signal operational by February 17, 2009.

Some stations, including those already broadcasting a digital signal, need to resolve various technical, coordination, or other issues before their transition to digital is complete. For example, over 13 percent of stations responding to our survey reported that they need to install or relocate their digital or analog antennas. Some of these stations still need to order equipment, such as antennas, to build their final digital facilities. Furthermore, stations may have coordination issues to address to complete their final digital facilities. In particular, some stations are awaiting agreements with the Canadian and Mexican governments regarding their signals crossing the borders of these respective countries before they can complete their digital facilities. Stations also need to coordinate with cable providers and satellite companies to ensure that cable and satellite facilities receive digital signals when the analog signals are turned off. Lastly, the construction of broadcast towers or financial constraints might affect some stations during their transition.

FCC's actions have provided guidance to broadcasters throughout the digital transition, but at the time we completed our survey, some broadcasters were awaiting FCC decisions. Since 1987, FCC has directed broadcasters with a series of rulemakings and orders, including assigning digital broadcast channels and developing timelines for the construction of digital facilities. Furthermore, FCC has conducted periodic reviews of the transition and released a ruling on its third periodic review on December 31, 2007, in which FCC addressed a number of important DTV issues. However, some stations responded to our survey that they needed decisions from FCC, such as approval for a construction permit or for changes to their final digital channel. According to FCC, it will address remaining issues quickly and with the release of an order in March 2008, FCC stated that it believes broadcasters have everything they need from the commission to proceed with construction of their final digital facilities.