

The V-Chip: Putting Restrictions on What Your Children Watch

FCC Consumer Facts

Background

The V-chip allows parents to block television programming that they don't want their children to watch. Most television programs are now assigned a rating according to a system established by the broadcasting industry. The rating is encoded with the program so that, using the remote control, parents can program the V-chip to block from viewing shows with certain ratings. If you lose your remote or need help programming the V-chip, contact the manufacturer of your television for a replacement remote or for instructions on how to operate the V-chip.

Rules

As of January 1, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) required all new television sets 13 inches or larger to contain the V-chip technology. You can usually tell whether your television has a V-chip by looking at the packaging. If you no longer have the packaging, V-chip equipped televisions will have the V-chip option displayed on the menu. According to television manufacturers, the V-chip will add less than one dollar to the cost of producing a set. If you want a V-chip but do not want to buy a new television, you can get a set-top box, which works the same as a built-in V-chip. Personal computers that include a television tuner and a monitor of 13 inches or more are also required to include V-chip technology.

The Ratings System

In 1996 Congress asked the broadcasting industry to establish a voluntary ratings system for TV programs. The industry did so by creating the ratings system known as "TV Parental Guidelines."

The Ratings System (cont'd.)

This system was established by the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable Television Association, and the Motion Picture Association of America.

Ratings appear in the corner of your television screen during the first 15 seconds of each program. The ratings are also included in many magazines and newspapers that provide TV listings. Ratings are given to all television programming except news, sports, and unedited movies on premium cable channels. There are six possible ratings:

- **TV-Y** (All Children) found only in children's shows, means that the show is appropriate for all children.
- **TV-7** (Directed to Older Children) found only in children's shows, means that the show is most appropriate for children age 7 and up.
- **TV-G** (General Audience) means that the show is suitable for all ages but is not necessarily a children's show.

(More)



The Ratings System (cont'd.)

- **TV-PG** (Parental Guidance Suggested) means that parental guidance is suggested and that the show may be unsuitable for younger children. This rating may also include a **V** for violence, **S** for sexual situations, **L** for language, or **D** for suggestive dialogue.
- **TV-14** (Parents Strongly Cautioned) means that the show may be unsuitable for children under 14. V, S, L, or D may accompany a rating of TV-14.
- **TV-MA** (Mature Audience Only) means that the show is for mature audiences only and may be unsuitable for children under 17. V, S, L, or D may accompany a rating of TV-MA.

For more information on these ratings, visit the FCC's web site at www.fcc.gov/vchip/.

The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board reviews the application of the ratings guidelines to television programming. The Monitoring Board has a Chairman and six members each from the broadcast television industry, the cable industry, and the program production community.

The Ratings System (cont'd.)

The Chairman also selects five non-industry members from the advocacy community, for a total of 24 members.

If you have a complaint about a television show's rating, you can contact the Monitoring Board at P.O. Box 14097, Washington, DC 20004, or you can call (202) 879-9364. In addition, you can visit the Monitoring Board's Web site at www.tvguidelines.org.

For More Information

For more information about the V-chip, contact the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau in the following ways:

Internet: www.fcc.gov/cgb

E-mail: fccinfo@fcc.gov

Consumer Center:
1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice
or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY.

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

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