

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 television 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

Since January 1, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has required all new television sets 13 inches or larger to contain a V-chip, a device that allows parents or other caregivers to block television programming that they don't want their children to watch. 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. 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 a V-chip.

The enactment of the Child Safe Viewing Act of 2007 requires the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to begin a study of:

- the existence and availability of advanced blocking technologies that are compatible with various communications devices;
- methods of encouraging the development, deployment and use of such technology by parents that do not affect the packaging or pricing of the content; and
- the existence, availability, and use of parental empowerment tools and initiatives already in the market.

Rules (cont'd.)

The new law directs the FCC to seek information on appropriate blocking technologies not only for TV programming, but content available on wireless devices and the Internet. The FCC must also examine blocking technologies that can filter language in closed captioning and operate independently of ratings assigned by the creator of the programming. The FCC must issue a report to Congress summarizing its findings.

The Ratings System

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

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 also are included in many magazines and newspapers that provide TV listings. Ratings are given to most television programming except news, sports, and unedited movies on premium cable channels. The ratings include:

(More)



The Ratings System (cont'd.)

- **TV-Y** (Directed to All Children) found only in children's shows, means that the show is designed specifically for a very young audience, including children from ages 2-6.
- **TV-Y7** (Directed to Older Children) found only in children's shows, means that the show is most appropriate for children age 7 and up.
- **TV-Y7-FV** (Directed to Older Children-Fantasy Violence) means that fantasy violence may be more intense or more combative than other programming in the TV-Y7 category.
- **TV-G** (General Audience) means that the show is suitable for all ages but is not necessarily a children's show.
- **TV-PG** (Parental Guidance Suggested) means that parental guidance is recommended 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 program is intended to be viewed by adults and may be unsuitable for children under 17. The program also contains one or more of the following: **V**, **S**, **L**, or **D** (violence, sexual situations, coarse language, or suggestive dialogue).

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

The Ratings System (cont'd.)

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 Chairman of the FCC 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, visit the FCC's Web site at www.fcc.gov/vchip. For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by e-mailing fccinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) 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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