

FCC Consumer Advisory

Closed Captioning and Digital-to-Analog Converter Boxes for Viewing Free Over-the-Air Programming on Analog Televisions

Overview of DTV Transition

The digital television (DTV) transition refers to the switch from analog to digital broadcast television. When the DTV transition was completed on June 12, 2009, all U.S. full-power TV stations stopped broadcasting in analog format, and now transmit only in digital.

Consumers who subscribe to pay television services (for example: cable, satellite) continue to receive broadcast (“over the air”) television programs through these subscription services. Consumers who do not have subscription TV services and are not receiving digital signals have two choices: (1) they can purchase a digital TV (either a stand alone digital TV or separate digital tuner set-top box) or (2) they can acquire a digital-to-analog converter box for each of their analog TVs to continue receiving free over-the-air digital television programming. The converter box converts the over-the-air digital signals into signals that analog TV sets can receive and display.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules require digital-to-analog converter boxes to pass through closed captions. This advisory explains how consumers can access closed captions using these converter boxes.

Closed Captioning and the Digital-to-Analog Converter Box

Closed captioning displays the audio portion of a television program as text on the television screen, enabling people with hearing loss and others to better access television programming. The digital-to-analog converter box receives closed caption signals and passes those closed caption signals to your TV automatically. In addition, many converter boxes generate captions through the converter box itself, thus enabling you to change the way your captions look.

How to Control Closed Captions Through Your TV

Analog TVs that are 13 inches or larger, and were manufactured after July 1993, can display closed captions. When using any digital-to-analog converter box on one of these TVs, you can follow the instructions that came with your TV to turn closed captions on or off through your TV or TV remote control, just as you always have. If you were able to see closed captions on your TV before you got the converter box, you will continue to see closed captions on your TV the same way after attaching the box. As before, captions appear as white text on a black background.

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Analog TVs that are smaller than 13 inches and TVs manufactured before July 1993 are not required to display closed captions. If your converter box is equipped to generate closed captions itself, however, you may be able to see closed captions on these TVs by following the instructions below.

How to See Closed Captions Through Converter Boxes Equipped Themselves to Generate Closed Captions

In addition to passing through closed caption signals, many converter boxes also include the ability to take over the captioning role that the tuner plays in your analog TV set. To determine whether your converter box is equipped to generate captions in this way, refer to the user manual that came with the converter box. If your converter box is equipped to generate captions in this way, then follow the instructions that came with the converter box to turn closed captions on or off via your converter box or converter box remote control. When you access the closed captions in this way, you can also change the way your digital captions look. The converter box will come with instructions on how to change the caption size, font (style), caption color, background color and opacity. This ability to adjust your captions is something you could not do with an analog television and analog captions.

What To Do if You Have Problems Getting Captions

If you turn on the digital-to-analog converter box and see a double row of overlapping captions, it may mean you are seeing captions through both your TV and your digital-to-analog converter box. You should turn off the closed captioning function either on your television or on the converter box.

If you are able to get captions when you tune to one station, but not another, most likely there is no problem with your converter box. You should contact the television station airing the program that does not have captions. If you are using a digital-to-analog converter box with an analog TV set and cannot see any captions, you should contact the manufacturer of the converter box.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC

If you have tried to resolve your problem viewing closed captioning in any of these ways but it continues, you can file a complaint with the FCC alleging a violation of the Television Decoder Circuitry Act and the FCC's implementing rules. There is no charge for filing a complaint. If your complaint concerns the inability of your converter box to deliver captions, you may complain directly to the FCC. If your complaint concerns the lack of captioning on a specific program or channel (i.e., you receive captions on some channels, but not others), you may file a written complaint with either the FCC or the television broadcaster. For more information on filing a complaint with your programming distributor and the information to include in such complaints, see the FCC's closed captioning consumer guide at www.fcc.gov/guides/closed-captioning. If you are uncertain where to file your complaint, contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the contact information provided for filing a complaint with the FCC below.

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You can file your complaint using an FCC online complaint form found at esupport.fcc.gov/complaints.htm?sid=&id=d1e3. You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice, 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, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554.

What to Include In Your Complaint to the FCC

The best way to provide all the information the FCC needs to process your complaint is to thoroughly complete the online complaint form. If you do not use the online complaint form, your complaint should indicate the following:

- your name, street, city, state and zip code and other contact information such as a videophone or TTY number or email address;
- the television channel number, call sign and network;
- the location of the TV station;
- the date and time when you experienced the captioning problem;
- the name of the program or show with the captioning problem; and
- a detailed description of the captioning problem.

Recorded submissions of the lack of closed captioning, in addition to what is listed above, are welcome but not required.

For More Information

For more information about the DTV transition, visit www.dtv.gov, and see the FCC's consumer guide at www.fcc.gov/guides/closed-captioning-digital-television-dtv. You can also contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the contact information provided for filing a complaint.

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