

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

FCC Consumer Facts

Background

The V-chip allows parents or other caregivers to block programming on their televisions that they don't want 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 before it airs. Parents can use the remote control to program the V-chip to block the display of programs that carry certain ratings. Rating systems currently in use are summarized below. The V-chip also can block programs based on any future rating system.

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. 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.

Digital-to-analog converter boxes used to watch over-the-air television on an older, analog television using an antenna also must have V-chips. If you have an older television without a V-chip and subscribe to a pay television service, your provider can supply a set-top box with a V-chip. Your provider may charge a fee for the set-top box. In addition, personal computers that include a television receiver and have a monitor of 13 inches or more must include a V-chip.

Recent FCC Actions

- Child Safe Viewing Act

In 2008, Congress passed the Child Safe Viewing Act (www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-110publ452/pdf/PLAW-110publ452.pdf) that directed the FCC to study the existence and availability of advanced blocking technologies parents can use to protect children from indecent or objectionable video or audio programming. The FCC conducted a proceeding to examine current blocking technologies and ratings systems used in connection with a variety of electronic media, including television,

Recent FCC Actions (cont'd.)

cable and satellite, wireless devices and the Internet. The FCC also considered methods of encouraging the development, deployment and use of such technology.

In 2009, the FCC issued a report to Congress (hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-09-69A1.pdf) summarizing its findings. The report discussed the kinds of advanced blocking technologies and other parental control tools that are available for each kind of media. While the FCC noted that parental tools and ratings systems exist for all types of media, it also noted there is no single parental control technology available today that works across all media platforms. In addition, the technologies available within each kind of media platform vary greatly with respect to cost, level of consumer awareness, adoption rate and other criteria. The FCC also noted that many commenters discussed the need for greater education and media literacy for parents and more effective ways to provide information about the tools available to them.

- Notice of Inquiry, Empowering Parents and Protecting Children in an Evolving Media Landscape

To follow up on the CSVA Report, the FCC issued a Notice of Inquiry (hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-09-94A1.pdf) in October of 2009 in MB

→
(More)



Recent FCC Actions (cont'd.)

Docket No. 09-194, titled Empowering Parents and Protecting Children in an Evolving Media Landscape. The NOI sought comment on how to help parents and children take advantage of the opportunities made possible by electronic media while protecting children from the risks these media can pose.

Television Program Ratings

In 1996, Congress asked the television industry to establish a voluntary rating system for TV programs. In response, the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Cable Television Association, and the Motion Picture Association of America created the rating system known as "TV Parental Guidelines."

Ratings appear in the upper left corner of your television screen during the first 15 seconds of each program and often after commercial breaks. 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 are:

- **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 Audiences) means that the show is suitable for all ages but is not necessarily a children's show.

Television Program Ratings (cont'd.)

- **TV-PG** – (Parental Guidance Suggested) means that parental guidance is recommended and that the program 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**.

The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board reviews the ratings guidelines and their application 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 public interest groups, for a total of 24 members.

If you have a complaint about a television program'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 website at www.tvguidelines.org.

(More)
→



Movie Ratings

Movie ratings are assigned based on a voluntary system created by the Motion Picture Association of America and the National Association of Theater Owners. A board of parents known as the Classification and Rating Administration assigns ratings after viewing, discussing, and voting on films. These movie ratings also are programmed into V-chips so that parents can use the V-chip to block movies shown on TV based on the movie ratings. The ratings are:

- **G** – (General Audiences) means material is appropriate for all ages.
- **PG** – (Parental Guidance Suggested) means that parental guidance is recommended and some material may be unsuitable for children.
- **PG-13** – (Parents Strongly Cautioned) means some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.
- **R** – (Restricted) means some material may be inappropriate for children under 17, and, if shown in a movie theater, requires accompanying parent or adult guardian.
- **NC-17** – (No One 17 and Under Admitted) means movie contains material that most parents would consider patently inappropriate for children 17 and under, and, if shown in a movie theater, no one 17 and under would be admitted.

For more information on movie ratings, visit www.mpaa.org.

How to Program the V-Chip

You can generally program the V-chip in your television, digital-to-analog converter box, or set-top box by using the remote control that came with the equipment. While different manufacturers may use different terms in their equipment set up and programming menus, the procedure is similar. Consult the equipment manual for specific instructions. If you have misplaced your manual, you may be able to view it by going to the following website:

tv.manualsonline.com/manuals/device/tv_converter_box.html.

To set the parental controls for your V-chip, follow these steps:

- Using the menu key on the remote control, locate the “main” or “setup” menu, then find an option that may be called “locks,” “block,” “parental controls” or “V-chip.” You should then get a prompt to enter a password.
- Enter a password that will enable you to lock TV channels and programming you decide are not appropriate for children. You can also use the password to override or unlock channels you want to watch but don’t want children to watch.
- Select the channels you want blocked, as prompted, generally using the “menu,” “select,” “number” and “arrow” keys.

(More)
→



How to Program the V-Chip (cont'd.)

- Select specific ratings assigned to TV programs and movies you want blocked, using keys indicated in the on-screen instructions.
- Save your settings by pressing the appropriate key, as prompted.

Again, these steps will vary depending on the equipment you are using.

For More Information

For more information about the V-chip, visit the FCC's website at www.fcc.gov/vchip. For information about other communications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau website at www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by 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

###

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an email to FCC504@fcc.gov.

To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, visit www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

