

Since television's inception, analog televisions have been used to receive and display programming. On February 17, 2009, full-power TV stations will broadcast only in digital (or DTV), and consumers will need to ensure that analog TVs are outfitted with a converter if they wish to continue receiving a free signal. Currently, many stations broadcast in both analog and digital, and the DTV transition will affect those who utilize the analog signal and watch TV through an antenna or "rabbit ears." Congress passed a law that requires the switch which will allow higher-quality, more efficient programming and will also free up airwaves for law enforcement, rescue and emergency communications.

Options for consumers

If consumers have an analog TV, and they wish to continue using free TV, they will be required to purchase a converter. The government is offering coupons that should cover most of the cost of the converters, which are now in stores. To receive a coupon, go to www.DTV2009.gov. Digital televisions will not need a converter, as they are ready for the switch. Those who currently pay for cable or satellite TV will already be set-up for the transition, but customers should call their cable company to be sure.

For more information, and answers for frequently asked questions, go to dtv.gov online or call 1-888-CALL-FCC.

Questions and answers

What is DTV?

For the past 50 years, US television stations (ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX & CW) have broadcast their signal in an analog format. Analog signals vary continuously, creating fluctuations in color and brightness. Digital Television (DTV) is an advanced broadcasting technology that enables broadcasters to offer television with better picture and sound quality. Currently, all US television stations broadcast both ANALOG and DIGITAL signals. After February 17, 2009 TV stations will broadcast in digital only.

How will the digital TV (DTV) transition affect me as a cable customer?

If you are a cable customer you will not be affected by the DTV transition. Cable companies will be handling all the digital to analog conversion and then sending the converted signal across their cable systems so every customer will be able to utilize their existing television.

Do I have to wait until after February 17, 2009 to watch DTV?

No, digital television is available now. Virtually all of the Lexington and Louisville broadcast stations are now transmitting both analog and digital signals. Some cable channels currently broadcast in digital.

If I have an older analog television, will I have to throw it away after February 17, 2009?

No. Customers will be able to use their current analog television to receive cable programming.

How can I be sure that I am buying a digital TV (DTV)?

By law, beginning March 1, 2007, all television reception devices (including TVs, VCRs, DVRs, etc.) imported into the U.S. or shipped in interstate commerce must contain a digital tuner. Retailers may continue to sell analog-only devices from existing inventory, but must prominently display on or near the analog-only device a Consumer Alert label advising them that a converter box will be required after February 17, 2009.

What about my VCR, DVD player, camcorder, and gaming console? Will I be able to use them with a digital television set?

Yes. Digital television sets are “backward compatible,” meaning existing analog equipment (VCRs, DVD players, camcorders, video games, etc.) will work on digital TV sets. However, their video will only be displayed in the maximum resolution that is available with each analog product. Manufacturers are producing a number of different connectors to hook equipment together and improve picture and sound quality when DTVs are used with existing analog equipment. Check with your retailer to determine the types of connectors that will work with your equipment.

What is the Digital-to-Analog Converter Box and do I need one?

At that time, over-the-air TV broadcasts will only be in digital form. If you have one or more televisions that receive free over-the-air television programming (with a roof-top antenna or “rabbit ears” on the TV), the type of TV you own is very important. A digital television (a TV with an internal digital tuner, sometimes called HD ready) will allow you to continue to watch free over-the-air programming after February 17, 2009. However, if you have an analog television, you will need a digital-to-analog converter box to continue to watch broadcast television on that set.

What is this Converter Box Coupon Program I've heard about?

To help consumers with the DTV transition, the Government established the Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), a part of the Department of Commerce, administers this program. Every U.S. household is eligible to receive up to two coupons, worth \$40 each, toward the purchase of eligible digital-to-analog converter boxes. You will be able to request the coupons beginning in January of 2008. The coupons may only be used for eligible converter boxes sold at participating consumer electronic retailers, and the coupons must be used at the time of purchase. Manufacturers estimate that digital-to-analog converter boxes will sell from \$50 to \$70 each. This is a one-time cost. For more information on the Digital-to-Analog Converter Box Coupon Program, visit the NTIA's web site at www.ntia.doc.gov/dtvcoupon, or call 1-888-388-2009 (voice) or 1-877-530-2634 (TTY).

Will the February 17, 2009 date for the end of full-power analog television broadcasting be pushed back?

Federal law mandates that February 17, 2009 is the last day for full-power analog television broadcasting. Government agencies, industry, public interest groups, and other interested organizations are working hard to make sure that the deadline is met and that everyone is prepared for the end of full-power analog television broadcasting.