The Broadcast Digital Transition

Impact on Cable Television Households

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The switch to digital-only television signals in early 2009 will usher in *the most substantive changes to American TV in generations."*

David Hatch, National Journal, 6/07



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The Broadcast Digital Transition

- Congress said that full power *over-the air broadcast TV stations* will convert from analog to digital broadcasting by February 17, 2009.
- They have been given a new digital broadcast channel for that purpose.
- At that time, they are to return the analog spectrum they are currently using to the federal government.



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Why is There a Broadcast Digital Transition?

The federal government wants to *reclaim valuable spectrum* that the broadcasters have been using and put it to other uses.

- Some will be used to enhance communications for emergency service providers like police, fire and emergency rescue,
- Much of it has been auctioned for commercial wireless services including mobile broadband.
- The recent auction raised almost $20 billion for the federal treasury.



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The Broadcast Digital Transition

How will this transition affect your television viewing?

If your TV is hooked up to cable television or another subscription video service, you don't need to do anything – you'll be fine.



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The Broadcast Digital Transition

"But… if you own an 'analog' TV set that is not connected to cable and uses either 'rabbit ears' or a roof-top antenna to receive signals, you will no longer be able to watch broadcast TV channels on it as of February 17, 2009… unless you take one of three steps."



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What Are Those Three Steps?

- Replace your TV set with one that includes a *digital tuner*, *or*
- Obtain a digital-to-analog converter that will convert digital TV signals back to analog, or
- Connect each of those analog TV sets to your local cable or another subscription video service offering local signals.



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Some Background

- Efforts to improve television signals began in the 1980s.
- Congress, in the 1996 Telecom Act, directed the FCC to give each “analog” broadcaster a new “digital” channel to migrate its broadcasts to.
- The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 set the Broadcast Digital Transition deadline at February 17, 2009 and allocated up to $1.5 billion for a digital-to-analog converter box program.



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How to Find Out if a TV is Analog or Digital

- A TV set with a "digital tuner" built in is configured to receive and display the new digital over-the-air broadcast TV signals that are currently being transmitted – and that will be the only broadcast TV signals transmitted starting February 17, 2009.

- Consult the owner's manual or look up information about the TV set on the manufacturer's website.



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How to Find Out if a TV is Analog or Digital

- Take an up-close look at the TV set to find out if it has an input connection labeled "digital input" or "ATSC" (it's the acronym for the new digital TV format).
- A TV set purchased before 1998 *probably doesn't* have a digital tuner. Almost every TV set made before 1998 was a traditional "analog" set that can't display digital TV signals.
- A big-screen, projection TV purchased between 1998 and 2004 may have a built-in digital tuner. A limited number of projection TV sets (and generally only those 42 inches or larger) made before 2004 contained digital tuners.

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How to Find Out if a TV is Analog or Digital

- Starting in 2004, many TV sets featured digital tuners.
- However, *some* of the newer TV sets are purely “display monitors” that do not contain digital tuners and cannot receive digital broadcast TV signals. These sets are usually advertised as "HD-ready" or "HDTV monitor" sets. While they can *display* digital and high-definition signals, you will need a digital converter or cable TV connection to *receive* those signals.



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Potential Problem – The Digital Cliff

- According to market-research firm Centris, *more than 9 million households* could experience some digital-TV-reception problems with the switch to digital TV.
- The risk of signal problems depends on terrain and distance from towers.
- These viewers will need to upgrade their receiving antennas as well as purchase new digital TVs or converter boxes.
- To find out if you might be affected, visit www.antennaweb.org.

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