



MAKING IT CLEAR

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT

DIGITAL TELEVISION

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It's enough to make even the most technologically adept person's head swim. Between "over the air" broadcast vs. cable and satellite TV, Standard Definition vs. High Definition signals, regular cable vs. digital cable, it can sometimes seem like it requires an engineering degree to figure out how to get the most out of your TV viewing experience. Throw in the fact that Congress has mandated the shutting off of all analog television transmissions in the U.S. as of February 17, 2009, and that might only add to the confusion.

Relax, don't panic. You don't need to spend a ton of money on a TV – or on an engineering degree in order to sail through the planned digital TV conversion without missing a moment of your favorite TV shows. In an attempt to answer some of the most common questions that come up in any discussion about digital TV, WPBS-TV assembled some of the material found at DTV.gov, a Website created by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and added some of our own information to it below:

WPBS-TV Prepares Audience for Shift to Digital TV

How can I see WPBS-TV's enhanced digital channels? Tune into Time Warner Cable, channel number 850 for WPBS-TV in digital format; Channel 851 for WPBS-TV's Create & ThinkBright multi-media digital broadcast services; and channel 853 for WPBS HD, a 24/7 high definition format channel.

If you use a cable company other than Time Warner, encourage them to carry WPBS-TV's enhanced digital channels. If you use an antenna, you'll need a TV with a digital tuner or an analog-to-digital converter box. Channel Designations for non-cable customers are:

WPBS Channel 16
TELEVISION

16.1 - WPBS-TV
16.2 - Create/Think Bright
16.3 - WPBS-TV HD

WPBS Channel 18
TELEVISION

18.1 - WPBS-TV
18.2 - Create/Think Bright
18.3 - WPBS-TV HD

The U.S. federal government is gearing up for Feb. 17, 2009, the day when TV stations will stop broadcasting analog signals, which means consumers then will have three options: They can buy new TV sets with digital tuners. They can connect to cable, or they can buy converter boxes that will allow them to receive digital broadcasts with their old analog TVs.

Effective January, 2008, each U.S. household can apply for two \$40 coupons to help buy the converter boxes. See page 3 for more information on the converter box coupon program.

So far, eight of the largest consumer electronics retailers - Best Buy, Circuit City, Kmart, RadioShack, Sam's Club, Sears, Target and Wal-Mart - have been certified to participate in the "TV Converter Box Coupon Program," along with more than 100 other retailers. They represent more than 14,000 stores throughout the country.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

What is the digital television transition?

The switch from analog to digital broadcast television is referred to as the digital TV (DTV) transition. In 1996, Congress authorized the distribution of an additional broadcast channel to each broadcast TV station so that they could start a digital broadcast channel while simultaneously continuing their analog broadcast channel. Later, Congress mandated that February 17, 2009 would be the last day for full-power television stations to broadcast in analog. Broadcast stations in all U.S. markets are currently broadcasting in both analog and digital. After that date, television stations including WPBS-TV will broadcast in “digital only.”

What if I'm a subscriber to a cable or satellite TV service?

Then you shouldn't notice a thing. It's only the means of delivering free over-the-air television signals that is changing. Cable and satellite TV companies will continue to deliver signals from local stations to you as they have in the past in compliance with FCC must-carry rules.

Why did Congress mandate the DTV transition?

A benefit of the switch to all digital broadcasting is that it will free up parts of the valuable broadcast spectrum for the public safety communications (such as police and fire departments, etc.). In addition, DTV also provides the opportunity for improved picture and sound quality. Also, some of the spectrum will be auctioned to wireless companies for the provision of advanced commercial wireless services (such as wireless broadband). The government stands to raise billions of dollars through the auction of the analog spectrum.

With the transition to digital, consumers will also benefit from a more efficient technology than the outdated analog system. For example, rather than being limited to providing one analog programming channel, a broadcaster will be able to provide a super sharp “high definition” (HD) program or multiple “standard definition” (SD) digital programs simultaneously. Providing several simultaneous programs on one broadcast channel is called “multicasting.” This means broadcasters can offer more choice of programming. Further, DTV can provide interactive video and data services that are not possible with analog technology.

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

No. A digital-to-analog converter box will allow you to continue using your existing analog TV to watch over-the-air digital broadcasts. You do not need to get rid of your existing analog TV. In addition, analog sets should continue to work as before if connected to a subscription service.

How do I receive Digital Television or High Definition Television?

In order to receive over-the-air digital programming (as opposed to digital programming provided by a provider such as cable or satellite) you will need: (1) a DTV or analog TV connected to a digital-to-analog converter box; and, (2) a broadcast antenna (either a rooftop antenna or rabbit ears) connected to your set. Whether programming is Standard Definition or High Definition depends on the broadcaster. WPBS-TV is currently providing two Standard Definition streams and one High Definition stream.

You mean I don't need a special antenna to receive DTV over-the-air?

In general, dependable reception of over-the-air digital TV programming requires the same type of signal reception equipment that currently works to provide good reception of analog TV programming. If you need a rooftop antenna to receive analog TV broadcasts, the same antenna generally will work to receive digital TV broadcasts. You should not have to purchase new antennas that are marketed as “digital ready” or “HD ready.”

Will digital-to-analog converter boxes also convert digital closed captioning?

Yes. FCC rules require that digital-to-analog converter boxes be able to convert over-the-air digital closed captioning for display on analog TV sets.

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

No. Digital television is available now. In fact, WPBS-TV has been broadcasting digital TV signals since November 2005, and multicasting since September 2007.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE

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

By law, as of March 1, 2007, all television reception devices 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 with an advisory to that effect. Therefore, all television equipment being sold should contain a digital tuner, or should be identified at the point-of-sale as not having one. Be aware of this label and the limitations of analog-only devices if you are purchasing a new TV or other TV equipment.

If I want a new TV will I have to buy a High Definition TV (HDTV) to watch digital broadcast television after the transition?

No. It is important to understand that the DTV transition is a transition from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting. It is not a transition from analog broadcasting to High Definition broadcasting. Digital broadcasting allows for High Definition broadcasts, but High Definition is not required, and you do not need to buy a HDTV to watch digital TV. A Standard Definition DTV (which is simply a TV with an internal digital tuner), or a digital-to-analog converter box hooked to an analog TV, is all that is required to continue watching over-the-air broadcast television. Digital broadcast television includes both Standard Definition (SD) and High Definition (HD) formats. You can watch High Definition programming on a Standard Definition DTV (or on an analog TV hooked to a digital-to-analog converter box), but it won't be in full High Definition quality. It is also important to know that Standard Definition DTVs are comparably priced to similar sized analog TVs.

My cable operator offers a digital cable package. Is this the same as HDTV?

No. "Digital Cable" and High Definition programming on cable are not the same. If you want to watch HDTV programming on cable, you will need to subscribe to your cable provider's HDTV package and view the programming on an HDTV set. You may also need a set-top box or other equipment to view HDTV programming. Check with your cable provider to find out what kinds of programming you can receive and what equipment you need to receive it.

CONVERTER BOX COUPONS

On Jan. 1, U.S. households can begin to take advantage of the TV Converter Box Coupon Program. Its aim is to help consumers buy converters that will allow them to use analog television sets to view digital programming.

Between Jan. 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009, households will be able to request coupons while supplies last in one of four ways:

- Apply online at www.dtv2009.gov. This Website will be active on Jan. 1.
- Call the Coupon Program 24-hour hotline 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), TTY 1-877-530-2634
- Mail a coupon application to: P.O. BOX 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000
- Fax a coupon application to 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632)

There are no income guidelines for eligibility. The government will begin distributing coupons on Feb. 17, 2008, one year before the transition takes effect. For answers to more of your questions, go to:

<http://www.dtv.gov/consumercorner.html#faq1>

DTV GLOSSARY

FROM DTV.GOV

Analog TV: Analog technology has been in use for the past 50 years to transmit conventional TV signals for consumers. Most current television transmissions are received through analog television sets. Analog signals vary continuously, creating fluctuations in color and brightness.

Datacasting: Also known as “enhanced TV,” datacasting is the act of providing enhanced options offered with some digital programming to provide additional program material or non-program related resources. This allows viewers the ability to download data (video, audio, text, graphics, maps, services, etc.) to specially equipped computers, cache boxes, set-top boxes or DTV receivers.

Digital: Digital refers to the circuitry in which data-carrying signals are restricted to one of two voltage levels, corresponding to logic 1 or 0.

Digital Cable: A service provided by many cable providers, digital cable offers viewers more channels. Contrary to many consumers’ beliefs, digital cable is not the same as High Definition television or digital television; rather digital cable simply offers cable subscribers the options of more services.

Digital Monitor: DTV monitors are televisions that can display a digital signal but lack an integrated tuner (unlike an integrated digital set), and thus cannot receive a digital broadcast signal without an additional set-top box.

Digital Television (DTV): Digital TV is the umbrella term encompassing High Definition television and several other applications, including Standard Definition television, datacasting, multicasting and interactivity.

Multicasting: The option to multicast was made possible by digital technology to allow each digital broadcast station to split its bit stream into 2, 3, 4 or more individual channels of programming and/or data services. (For example, on channel 16, you could watch 16.1, 16.2 or 16.3).

Must-carry: This refers to the legal obligation of cable companies to carry analog or digital signals or over-the-air local broadcasters.

Set-top Converter Box: This unit sits on top of the viewer’s analog TV, receives the Digital TV signal, converts it to an analog signal and then sends that signal on to the analog TV.

WPBS-TV has every intention of assisting our viewers and members located in Canada who still watch our over the air signal with a rooftop antenna or rabbit ears. We will be following Canada’s conversion with great interest and firmly believe they will not be far behind, if at all. If a coupon program is not available in Canada, WPBS-TV will try to work with retailers on both sides of the border to ensure our viewers/members in Canada can continue to receive all of their favorite channels originating from broadcasters in the U.S. For now, being informed is the most important initiative as we have a year to work on this together.