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THE DIGITAL TV TRANSITION

What You Need To Know About DTV

FCC-MAYORS' DIGITAL TELEVISION INITIATIVE

The **FCC-Mayors' Digital Television Initiative** is designed to establish working relationships between cities across the country and the Federal Communications Commission. It will enhance the efforts of the FCC and other organizations to provide consumers, particularly those who will be most affected by the transition of full power television stations throughout the United States to digital operation (the DTV transition), with critical information about the transition. **This outreach is important because, unless viewers with older analog TV sets take action by the transition deadline of February 17, 2009, they will no longer be able to use an over-the air antenna to receive the programming of their local television stations.**

Our objective is to explore ways that we can work with mayors' offices as they reach out to their citizens to educate them about the transition and the steps that viewers may need to take in order to continue watching free over-the-air broadcast television after the transition is complete next February. We believe that such relationships would be mutually beneficial in reaching members of each community, and would allow us to combine our expertise concerning the transition with the mayors' resources, familiarity with their cities and local relationships. For our part, we have prepared a number of fact sheets addressing various aspects of the transition, as well as posters, power point presentations, articles, sample press releases and other materials to assist mayors in getting the word out to the residents of their cities. (You can view these materials at www.dtv.gov.) We can provide copies of these posters and fact sheets in bulk, in whatever quantity is required. Details about the DTV transition, as well as this Initiative, are provided below.

The DTV Transition: Background

At present, most television stations are transmitting programming on two channels, the analog channel, on which they have been operating for years, and a second, digital channel that they were assigned within the last several years. On February 17, 2009, TV stations must stop broadcasting in analog and must transmit only in digital. This statutory change will provide many public benefits, including making more spectrum available for communications by and among public safety officials, such as police, fire and emergency rescue workers. Digital operation will also allow each TV station to choose to offer multiple channels of programming, a practice known as multicasting, and to air programming in high definition, with superior picture and sound.

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This transition will require consumers with older analog television sets (TVs without digital tuners) who receive free over-the-air television through either a rooftop antenna or "rabbit ears" (rather than by pay services, such as cable or satellite) to take action in order to continue to receive a television signal after the transition deadline. Generally, each such consumer has three options to prepare for the DTV transition:

1. **Purchase a digital-to-analog converter box and connect one to each analog set.** Congress has established a program to assist consumers in purchasing these converter boxes. Every household is entitled to two \$40 coupons, each of which can be used to help purchase a converter box. (Each analog television needs a separate box.) This program is administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), a part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. **Until March 31, 2009**, coupons may be requested from NTIA, at www.dtv2009.gov, or by calling 888-DTV-2009;
2. **Buy a digital television (one that includes a digital tuner).** A consumer does **not** have to buy a high definition TV (HDTV) to receive digital television programming. A standard definition set, priced comparably to a similarly featured analog television, will receive over-the-air digital programming; or
3. **Subscribe to a paid TV service.** If a TV set receives local broadcast stations through a paid provider, such as cable or satellite TV, it is already prepared for the DTV transition. However, note that, for such subscribers, each analog TV that does not receive local broadcast stations through the provider will need a digital-to-analog converter box to allow viewing of digital broadcasts. Also, cable companies are **not** required by the DTV transition, which affects only full power, over-the-air broadcast stations, to switch any of their channels to digital, although they may choose to do so for business reasons. Moreover, as long as a cable company offers any analog service, it must provide customers with their local broadcast stations so that they can watch them on an analog cable set-top box.

FCC- Mayors' Digital Television Initiative

The DTV transition may disproportionately affect certain segments of the population, particularly those who are more likely to have older, analog televisions and who rely exclusively upon free over-the-air television, rather than by subscribing to cable, satellite, or some other paid television service. These groups include seniors, people with disabilities, non-English speaking individuals, members of minority groups, people with low incomes, and residents of rural and tribal areas. Recent studies reveal that many

-2-

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residents of your city may need to take action in anticipation of the DTV transition.

To address the daunting task of reaching out to each of these potentially affected individuals, FCC Chairman Kevin J. Martin has created a collaborative program with mayors, the **FCC-Mayors' Digital Television Initiative**. We are inviting mayors across the country to join with the FCC in our efforts to inform the public, particularly members of the targeted groups, about the DTV transition. We know that many local officials are already working hard to inform the residents of their cities about the DTV transition. We applaud these efforts and offer our resources and support. In addition, to the extent that you are not already doing so, we ask that you consider engaging in any or all of the following local activities:

Spread the Word:

- Add a link to the FCC's dedicated DTV website, www.dtv.gov on the city website (instructions on how to link to the site are available at www.dtv.gov/dtvlogos.html).
- Arrange for the display of DTV transition posters and the distribution of DTV fact sheets (which can be found on our DTV website noted above) at:
 - city offices, including schools and libraries;
 - local businesses and other locations open to the public, including grocery stores, airports, and bus and train stations; and
 - local public events, such as conventions, conferences, musical performances, street fairs, and festivals.
- Include information or articles about the DTV transition in your city newsletters, list serves, and other publications that are sent to employees or to the public (a sample article is available at http://www.dtv.gov/outreach_samplenews1.html).
- Identify upcoming conferences, conventions and community events (including town hall meetings, in which we may be able to participate), at which someone from your office can discuss the DTV transition. We can help your staff become familiar with the subject matter, and our power point presentation is available at <http://www.dtv.gov/TransitionPresentation.pdf>. A sample news release for such an event is available at http://www.dtv.gov/outreach_samplenews2.html).
- Reach out to other city consumer-oriented or grassroots organizations that may assist in these efforts, particularly those involved with the targeted groups noted above.

-3-

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Additional Ideas:

- Promote a city recycling plan for discarded televisions to accommodate the anticipated increase in the number of such sets as a result of the DTV transition.
- Encourage school principals to permit students to participate in a community service program to distribute DTV transition materials to the public.

Create a Team:

- Depending upon the resources that you choose to devote to this project, you may also consider establishing a team comprised of other local government officials, business leaders, and representatives of the local broadcast and print media, to help spread the word about the DTV transition, with a mayor's staff person serving as leader of this local team.

The foregoing list is not intended to be exhaustive, and we seek your input as to other ways that you believe this critical information can best be made available to your city's residents. You know your community better than we do. We stand ready to provide whatever support you need to make your local efforts as effective as possible. We can participate in discussions with you and your team about our experience in conducting DTV outreach, what we consider to be best practices, and the resources we can make available to you based upon your specific needs. In so doing, we can also provide your office with the information it needs to respond to consumers who will be contacting it with questions as the DTV transition approaches.

On August 18, 2008, six months before next February's transition deadline, the Commission will issue a press release announcing the **FCC-Mayors' Digital Television Initiative**. In it, Chairman Martin will recognize and thank each mayor and city that has agreed to participate in the program. Also on that day, the FCC will conduct a press conference that conveys this information, as well as details about the Initiative. It is our hope that we can include your city and mayor in these announcements, and that we can work together to get this vital information to all of the residents of your city.

We look forward to working with you.

-4-

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