

# Television Digital-to-Analog Changeover Fact Sheet

## Background

President Bush recently signed the Deficit Reduction Act which includes the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act (DTV Act), preparing US consumers for the end of free, over-the-air, analog broadcasts. Congress passed this legislation in 2005 requiring all U.S. television stations to switch from analog to digital-only broadcasting by Feb. 17, 2009. The switch will free up airwaves for public safety communications (i.e., police, fire and emergency rescue) and wireless services. Additionally, digital broadcasting will provide better picture quality and sound. Digital TV also allows stations to “multicast” – broadcast multiple channels using the same bandwidth – resulting in more programming options.

## Problem

There is considerable misinformation being circulated by the media and government agencies about the number of TVs that will be disposed of due to the switch to the all digital signal. In reality, many consumers are not aware of the digital switch over. Of those consumers that do know about the switch over, many may be contemplating discarding TVs when they really don't have to.

The DTV Act has the potential to create an increased toxic waste disposal issue, as consumers begin to replace their out-dated analog televisions with digital and high definition (HDTV) units. DEQ predicts gradual, but steady, removal of old TVs based more on new technology and cheaper prices. Currently in the Commonwealth of Virginia and nationwide, electronic waste recycling and disposal programs may not be adequate enough to handle the increase of television electronic waste. More importantly, a large educational outreach program is necessary to alert consumers about the dangers of toxins in electronics and the availability of electronic recycling programs, as well as consumer's options for the digital-to-analog change over.

## Solution

The upcoming, federally mandated switch to digital-only broadcasting in February 2009 does not mean people will have to discard their existing television set. How can you help keep old or discarded TV sets out of the waste stream?

### *What's the best thing to do environmentally?*

Keeping your existing TV is the best option, both environmentally and financially. You do not need to purchase a new TV to receive programming after the switch. You may, however, need to take some simple steps to ensure continued service. What you need to do depends on the source of your programming (free broadcasting, cable, or satellite service) and the type of TV you have (digital or analog).

A simple, one-time purchase of a converter box (for analog TVs using an antenna) or a cable or satellite subscription (for analog or digital TVs) will allow you to receive digital broadcasts with your existing TV.

**A digital-to-analog (DTA) converter box** is a device which converts digital television broadcast signals to analog signals. The U.S. is scheduled to shift to digital-only TV

broadcasts on February 17, 2009. As of this date, consumers with analog TVs who do not subscribe to cable or satellite services and rely solely on over-the-air broadcasts for their TV-viewing will need a digital-to-analog converter box, or DTA, in order to continue receiving television broadcasts. These boxes will be sold by a range of retailers beginning in late 2008, shortly before the analog to digital transition.

According to estimates, consumers are expected to purchase as many as 22 million DTAs, leading up to and immediately following the transition to all-digital broadcasting. Until March 31, 2009, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration will administer a program to help consumers acquire DTAs, which are expected to cost between \$50 and \$70. NTIA is expected to provide up to two \$40 coupons per household to offset the cost of up to two eligible converter boxes. Converter boxes are available at consumer electronics retailers nationwide. To request coupons for digital converter boxes and view a list of participating retailers, visit the TV Converter Box Coupon Program's Web site: <http://www.dtv2009.gov>.

EPA's Energy Star program is announcing new specifications that are expected to cut the energy use of digital-to-analog converter boxes, or DTAs, by more than 70 percent. With more energy-efficient designs and features that automatically power a product down after periods of inactivity, Energy Star-qualified DTAs will use substantially less energy than current models sold worldwide. If all DTAs meet the Energy Star specification, Americans could save 13 billion kWh and over \$1 billion in energy costs, and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those of 1 million cars.

#### *What should I do with my old TV?*

If you do choose to purchase a new digital TV and your old TV is in working condition, you have several options:

- Keep the old TV as a second TV for games, videos and DVDs
- Give your old TV to a friend or donate it to a second-hand store
- Recycle it

If your old TV is no longer working, bring it to a recycler. TVs and other consumer electronics contain materials that can be reclaimed and used again. They also contain toxic components, which a responsible recycler can safely dispose of.

#### **Where to go from here: FAQs**

##### *How can I tell if my TV is digital or analog?*

If your TV is more than a few years old, it's likely an analog set. Check the owner's manual, the manufacturer's Web site, or the device itself for indication that it contains an Advanced Television Systems Committee (ASTC) tuner, also known as a "digital tuner." Please note that being "digital-ready" is not the same thing as having a digital tuner.

##### *I use an antenna to receive free broadcasting. What should I do?*

If you have a digital TV, your TV will continue to work with an antenna after the switch. If you have an analog TV, the easier and most inexpensive option is to purchase a converter box. A converter box plugs into your TV and, when used in conjunction with an antenna, allows your TV to receive digital broadcasting after the switch.

*I'm a cable or satellite subscriber. Do I need to do anything?*

If you're a cable or satellite subscriber, regardless of whether you have an analog or digital TV, ask your service provider if any action is needed. Some services may require a new cable box in order to receive digital broadcasts.

Please note that a cable box is not the same as a converter box. A cable box, if necessary, will be supplied by your service provider. Many cable companies have already informed their customers of the need to make this change and are actively providing the cable boxes. You do not need a converter box if you're a cable or satellite subscriber.

*Will my VCR or DVD player work with a converter box?*

Yes. Your existing VCR, DVD player, TiVo, and other analog equipment you use with your TV will work with a converter box. However, if you want to watch one station and record another at the same time, you'll need an additional converter box for your recording device.

#### **Where can I find more information? - Website Links**

National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA) - [www.ntia.doc.gov](http://www.ntia.doc.gov)

NTIA will administer a coupon program to help households without digital-ready televisions purchase DTA converter boxes.

EPA [ENERGY STAR Digital-to-Analog Converter Boxes](#) - expected to cut the energy use of digital-to-analog converter boxes, or DTAs, by more than 70 percent.

For more information on the switch to digital television, visit the TV Converter Box Coupon Program's Web site at <http://www.dtv2009.gov>.

[EPA Working to Make Digital Television Technology Energy Efficient](#)