

Transition to Digital Television

Change in Television Broadcasting

On February 17, 2009 the United States television industry will change from analog to digital broadcasts. Some stations are already broadcasting in digital. The 2-to-70-channel range for free-programming received using antennas (rabbit ears) will be compacted to be via channels 2 to 51. This change will free up spectrum for other uses while providing better quality pictures to viewers.

Converter Boxes Needed For Older Televisions

Recent television models (sold after March 2007) should be digital ready. Since this change has been in process for over ten years, other televisions may also include the necessary technology. Look for labels that say Integrated Digital Tuner, Digital Turner Built-In, Digital Receiver, Digital Tuner, DTV, ATSC, or HDTV. Other television models will need a converter box to receive television signals. Satellite-television connections should be able to receive the digital images but may need different equipment to receive *high-definition*-quality programming. Some viewers with cable service may need a converter box, so they should check with their provider. Comcast customers will not need a converter box.

All U.S. households are eligible for two coupons worth \$40 each to be used toward the purchase of digital-to-analog converter boxes through March 31, 2009. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is administering the coupon program and can be reached at www.DTV2009.gov or by calling 1-888-388-2009. The list of coupon eligible converter boxes can be found at https://www.ntiadtv.gov/cecb_list.cfm.

Rural Counties and Canadian Stations Will Still Have Analog

Canada will transition its television stations in August 2011, and some United States low-power and translator television stations, often found in rural areas, may continue to broadcast in analog after the February deadline. People who want to be able to receive analog broadcasts will want to purchase a converter box with "analog pass-through" capability so that their televisions can receive the appropriate signals.

There are several ways to determine whether the broadcast stations you view over-the-air with an antenna are LPTV, Class A or TV translator stations. Class A stations are required to visually or orally identify their stations with their community of license and call sign (that includes the suffix "-CA" for Class A) on an hourly basis. LPTV stations also must regularly identify their station call sign. When locally originating programming, they must visually or orally identify their call sign and community of license hourly. LPTV call signs may consist of four letters followed by the suffix "-LP" (for low power) or, alternatively, five characters beginning with the letters K or W followed by two numbers (their operating channel) and two additional letters.