

DIGITAL TELEVISION – PART 1

Editor's Note: This is the first in a two-part series discussing what digital television is and the upcoming changes relating to digital TV.

What is digital television?

Digital television (DTV) is a new standard for over-the-air broadcasting that enables TV stations to provide clearer pictures and better sound quality. DTV is also more efficient and flexible than the traditional broadcast technology known as analog. DTV makes it possible for stations to broadcast multiple channels of free programming simultaneously (called multicasting), instead of broadcasting only one channel at a time. The analog TV standard was established in 1940 and revised in 1953 to support color TV. To capitalize on advances made in electronics over the last half century it was necessary to create a new standard that was not backward compatible with the existing TV standard.

What is the digital TV DTV transition?

The switch from analog to digital broadcast television is referred to as the digital TV DTV transition. In 1996, the U.S. 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. Congress allowed until April 1, 2005, for all markets to have DTV broadcast coverage. 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 February 17, 2009, full-power television stations will broadcast in digital only.

What do I need to do to be ready for the end of analog TV broadcasting?

Because Congress mandated that the last day for full-power television stations to broadcast in analog would be February 17, 2009, over-the-air TV broadcasts will be in digital only after that date. If you have one or more televisions that receive free over-the-air television programming (with a roof antenna), the type of TV installed will determine if you will need to add a digital-to-analog converter box to continue receiving over-the-air broadcast. A digital television (all TVs in 2009 model year and most TVs in 2008 model year) will allow you to continue to watch free over-the-air programming after February 17, 2009. However, if you have an analog television (all 2006 and earlier model years), you will need a digital-to-analog convert box to continue to watch broadcast television on that set. This converter box will also enable you to see any additional multicast programming that your local stations are offering.

Cable and satellite TV subscribers with analog TVs hooked up to their cable or satellite service should not be affected by the February 17, 2009, cut-off date for full-power analog broadcasting.

Will I need a special antenna to receive DTV over-the-air?

No. Your motor home antenna is DTV ready, however the digital television signal is more sensitive to the antenna direction, especially in fringe reception areas so additional care should be taken when adjusting the

antenna to optimize your picture and sound quality.

Is there an easy way to determine if I have a Digital TV?

Take the original TV remote, and if your remote has a "." Or "_" button then try to tune to a digital multicast channel (i.e. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 etc.), if you can tune to a digital station, even if no signal is present, you should have a Digital TV tuner.

How can I get the \$40 government coupon?

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is administering the coupon program. For more information, visit the NTIA website at www.dtv2009.gov. Each household may apply for up to two \$40 coupons to offset the cost of the digital-to-analog converter box, and in many cases that will cover the entire cost. Note that not all converters will qualify for this program; see the NTIA website for more information.

Where is the best place to add digital-to-analog converter?

That depends on your viewing needs; if a single tuner for all of your TVs is acceptable then our recommendation is to install the digital-to-analog converter box in the cabinet with the Video Selection Switch. If you want to be able to watch different off the air programs at the same time then each set will need a digital-to-analog converter box.

Next month we will cover how to install a digital-to-analog converter box on individual TVs as well as at the Video Selection Switch.