

Apply. Buy. Try. Consumers Urged To Prepare For The Switch To Digital TV Before The End Of The Year

by Meredith Baker

(NAPSA)—The switch to all-digital broadcasting is quickly approaching and will offer consumers a clearer picture and more programming choices. Television viewers with analog TV sets using a rooftop antenna or “rabbit ears” are at risk of losing their TV signal if they do not act now or before the end of year to request their converter box coupons.

According to Nielsen data, of the 112.8 million U.S. television households, 9.6 million or 8.4 percent, are completely unready for the switch. This means that on February 17, 2009, when the digital television transition occurs, TVs in these homes will lose their signal if consumers don't take timely action. Consumers with digital televisions and TVs connected to cable, satellite or other pay service do not need to act.

But consumers who want to keep using their analog TVs with an antenna after the transition can purchase a TV converter box using a \$40 government coupon. The U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, which is responsible for running the TV Converter Box Coupon Program, is providing up to two coupons per household upon request and recommends the following three steps:

Step 1: Apply

Apply for a TV Converter Box coupon now. Coupons are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Each household can apply for up to two coupons online at www.DTV2009.gov, by calling 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), via fax at 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632), or by mail to P.O. Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208. Deaf or hard of hearing callers may dial 1-877-530-2634 (English



TTY) or 1-866-495-1161 (Spanish TTY).

Step 2: Buy

Consumers should buy their converter box soon after their coupon(s) arrive in the mail. Consumers will receive a list of nearby participating retailers with their coupons. They should do their research swiftly and make a timely purchase that's right for them. Coupons expire in 90 days from the date printed on the card.

Step 3: Try

Once a consumer has purchased a TV converter box, they should try the box on their analog TV. This provides the opportunity to test the box and troubleshoot potential problems prior to the transition date. Installing a converter box also provides the immediate benefits of a clearer picture and more channels, where available. If you need further technical help, the Federal Communications Commission provides a useful guide at www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/troubleshootguide.html.

While every situation is unique, consumers should allow a minimum of six weeks to ensure that their television signal continues to work prior to the nation switching to all-digital broadcasting on February 17, 2009. I urge all consumers to apply, buy and try today.

• *Meredith Baker is the acting assistant secretary for communications and information at the U.S. Department of Commerce.*