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Commerce's NTIA Works with Local Community Groups to Educate Consumers About the Benefits of the Digital TV Transition and Coupon Program

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DALLAS/FT. WORTH –The U.S. Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) today kicked off *Digital Television: Experience the Benefits*, an effort with local organizations across the country to educate consumers about the benefits of the digital TV transition and the TV Converter Box Coupon Program. After February 17, 2009, all full-powered television stations will begin broadcasting only in digital.

"NTIA recognizes local organizations are trusted sources of information in the community and they can provide unique assistance in educating consumers about the digital television transition and the TV Converter Box Coupon Program," said Acting NTIA Administrator Meredith Baker. "*Digital Television: Experience the Benefits* is a rallying point of support and action for NTIA and our local supporters to ensure that this historic transition leaves no Americans in the dark."

NTIA is coordinating with local supporters to conduct informational sessions and demonstrations for community residents. Local *Digital Television: Experience the Benefits* events include an "Ask the Experts" day at RadioShack's flagship store in Ft. Worth, Texas (March 31); a public educational session lead by the Vernon Community Action Council in Leesville, Louisiana (April 1); and a presentation at an English as a Second Language class in Visalia, California (April 3). This week, similar events are scheduled to take place in Fayetteville, NC (April 1); Sioux City, IA (April 1); Norfolk, VA (April 2); Fairbanks, AK (April 2); Philadelphia, PA (April 4); and Boise, ID (April 4).

These local events will provide the public an opportunity to learn more about why the digital TV transition is happening and their options, which include: purchasing a converter box that will plug in to an existing analog TV set; connecting the analog TV to cable, satellite or other pay service; or buying a TV with a digital tuner. They will also learn about the individual benefits, which they may experience immediately, and the community benefits of the digital television transition including:

- **Better picture and sound quality:** Most viewers will see improved clarity and color when watching their favorite news, sports or entertainment programming.
- **Additional channels/multicasting:** TV stations will be able to provide several channels of programming at once. For example, if you normally watch channel two, it will still be available to you, but you may also get channel 2-1 that broadcasts local weather throughout the day and channel 2-2 that provides your favorite programs at a different time of day. These channels will be available at no additional cost.
- **Additional services and innovations:** Additional data services, such as enhanced closed-captioning, that are not possible in analog will now be available, and the spectrum space that will become available allows for the development of next generation broadband services.
- **Improved emergency communications:** With the switch from analog to digital, portions of the analog TV airwaves (known as the "spectrum"), will be made available to local emergency responders such as local firefighters, police and 9-1-1 responders. This means improved emergency communications capacity and safer communities.

"We realize that many consumers are looking for an opportunity to ask questions and see a television converter box first hand," said Acting Administrator Baker. "We believe activities happening this week, and throughout the spring, will provide consumers with that opportunity."

Background:

The Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 requires full-power television stations to cease analog broadcasts and switch to digital after February 17, 2009. The Act also authorizes the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, to create the TV Converter Box Coupon Program. Through the Program, all U.S. households are able to request up to two, \$40 coupons to help pay for the cost of certified TV converter boxes. Consumers with an analog TV can purchase a converter box and connect it today to begin experiencing the benefits of a clearer picture and additional programming.

By February 17, 2009, consumers need to look at each analog television set in their home that is not connected to cable, satellite or other pay television service and make a decision:

- o They may connect it to cable, satellite or pay television service;
- o They may replace it with a TV with a digital tuner or
- o They may keep it working with a TV converter box.

Between now and March 31, 2009, households that wish to request more information or coupons should call 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), or visit www.DTV2009.gov, or apply by mail at PO Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208, or deaf or hard of hearing callers may dial 1-877-530-2634 (English/TTY) or 1-866-495-1161 (Spanish/TTY).

NTIA will provide consumers a list of eligible converters and participating retailers when coupons are mailed and on its Web site. Coupons expire 90 days after they are mailed, and only one coupon can be used to purchase each coupon-eligible converter box.

NTIA is responsible for the development of the domestic and international telecommunications policy of the Executive Branch.

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