



COMMERCE NEWS

U.S. Department of Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20230

Office of the Secretary
www.commerce.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 2008

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Gutierrez Says Digital TV Converter Box Coupon Program Off to Great Start With Almost 1.9 million coupons requested

WASHINGTON — With the United States set to switch completely from analog to digital television in February 2009, U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez today issued the following statement on the launch of the TV Converter Box Coupon Program, designed to help facilitate the changeover.

"The TV Converter Coupon Program opened as scheduled on January 1, and is off to a great start. Americans have begun requesting coupons that will help them get the converter boxes needed for when our television signals change on February 17, 2009. With these coupons, the federal government will defray \$40 of the cost of an eligible converter, which is expected to cost between \$50 and \$70.

"The demand for coupons is strong. We've taken requests from every state for nearly 1.9 million coupons from more than one million households.

"Digital television provides consumers with a clearer picture, more programming, and frees up spectrum for advanced wireless broadband services and interoperable communications among emergency first responders.

"The public has until February 17, 2009 to decide how to keep their analog televisions working."

Televisions hooked up to cable, satellite or other pay services do not need a converter from the TV Converter Box Coupon Program.

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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 Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to create the TV Converter Box Coupon Program.

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:

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

Coupons are worth \$40 each, to be used toward the purchase of up to two, digital-to-analog converter boxes. Between January 1, 2008, and March 31, 2009, households can request coupons while funding is available in one of four ways:

- Apply online at www.dtv2009.gov .
- Call the Coupon Program 24-hour hotline 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), TTY 1-877-530-2634
- Mail a coupon application to: PO BOX 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000
- Fax a coupon application to 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632)

Coupons are planned to be distributed to consumers beginning February 17, 2008, when retailers are expected to accept coupons and have certified converters on shelves. Participating retailers include Best Buy, Circuit City, Kmart, Target, Sam's Club, Sears, RadioShack, Wal-Mart, and more than 100 others with more than 14,000 stores throughout the nation.

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

NTIA encourages the voluntary participation of consumer electronics retailers. The application deadline to become a certified retailer is March 31, 2008. Consumer electronics retailers interested in participating in the program should go to www.ntiadtv.gov or call 1-866-296-1107 for additional information and to sign up as a participating retailer.

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

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