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Commerce's NTIA Releases TV Converter Box Coupon Program Request Rate by TV Market with 100 Days Until Digital TV Transition Concludes

Consumers Should "Apply, Buy and Try" Before End of the Year

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WASHINGTON—The Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) today announced updated participation rates by television market and that 62 percent of all over-the-air households, those that rely on an antenna for broadcast TV, have requested coupons from the TV Converter Box Coupon Program. The program helps households switch to digital television when full-power TV broadcasters transition from analog to 100 percent digital broadcasts on February 17, 2009--100 days from today.

"The Coupon Program is successful and very popular with 17 million households requesting more than 33.5 million coupons and redeeming 13.5 million of them, to date," said Acting NTIA Administrator Meredith Baker. "I am very pleased with the large number of over-the-air households we have served. Combined with households choosing to purchase a TV set or subscribing to cable, satellite or other pay TV service, households are making a timely transition to digital television. However, we also realize that many people still need coupons. With only 100 days until the digital transition concludes, NTIA urges consumers who need a coupon to apply before the end of the year, purchase a converter when the coupons arrive in the mail and install it immediately to enjoy the benefits of digital television."

Of the 210 television markets, 172 have over 50% participation among over-the-air households; 45 markets have a 75 percent or greater participation rate. Forty-five markets have a 75 percent or greater participation rate for "over-the-air" TV households. The markets with the highest coupon application rates include, Wilmington, NC; Salisbury, MD; Myrtle Beach-Florence, SC; Quincy (IL)-Hannibal (MO)-Keokuk (IA); and Charleston-Huntington, WV. The markets with the lowest coupon application rates are: Juneau, AK; Glendive, MT; Honolulu, HI; Eureka, CA; and Anchorage, AK.

Households that rely on an antenna that are choosing to transition to digital television by purchasing a TV converter box with a coupon need to follow three steps and act by the end of the year because the process may take about six weeks. Consumers should immediately **apply** for their coupons, **buy** a converter box, and **try** the box with their television to minimize the chances of losing TV reception when full-power broadcasters switch to digital.

For a complete listing of the markets and their participation rates by "over-the-air" TV household, go online at www.ntia.doc.gov and for more information about the Coupon Program, go to www.DTV2009.gov. (Direct link for report: http://www.ntia.doc.gov/dtvcoupon/DTV_OTAHH_Participation_081101.pdf)

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. In Hawaii, full-power television broadcasters will convert to all-digital broadcasts on January 15, 2009. The Act authorizes NTIA to create the TV Converter Box Coupon Program, which is funded by the \$19 billion airwaves auction and not tax dollars.

Digital broadcast television offers consumers a clearer picture, more programming choices and will free up the airwaves for better communications among emergency first responders and new telecommunications services.

Over-the-air television viewers need to look at each analog TV in their home that is not connected to cable, satellite or other pay television service and make a timely decision. They can connect their TV to cable, satellite or pay television service; they can replace it with a digital TV; or they may keep it working with a TV converter box.

For consumers choosing the converter box option, the TV Converter Box Coupon Program permits all households to request one or two coupons - each worth \$40 - toward the purchase of certified converter boxes. Coupons may be requested until March 31, 2009, or while supplies last. Consumers can purchase a converter box at more than 35,000 participating local, phone or online retailers. Converter boxes generally cost between \$40 and \$80.

Some viewers watch programs over translators or other low-power stations which may continue broadcasting analog signals after February 17, 2009. Those viewers may wish to select a converter box that will pass through analog signals.

Households may apply now for coupons online at www.DTV2009.gov, by phone at 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 97208-2000. Deaf or hard of hearing callers may dial 1-877-530-2634 (English TTY) or 1-866-495-1161 (Spanish TTY). Consumers will receive a list of eligible converter boxes and participating retailers with their coupons. Coupons expire 90 days after they are mailed, and only one coupon can be used to purchase each coupon-eligible converter box.

If viewers have difficulty receiving digital broadcast stations in their area, the following troubleshooting guide, www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/troubleshootguide.html produced by the Federal Communications Commission, provides a checklist for connecting a converter and tips on reception of digital signals.

For more information about the Coupon Program, please visit www.DTV2009.gov and for questions about the DTV transition, go to www.dtv.gov or call 1-888-CALL-FCC.

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

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