

Question: When I was watching the news the other evening, I saw the reporter talking about the government making a law that would change how television works. They said that if you didn't have cable television your TV would not work any more and that you would have to get a new set. Will my television really quit working next year?

Answer: The news report that you watched was about a change that will occur next year on Feb. 17, 2009. That's when stations will stop broadcasting in analog format and will continue broadcasting in digital only. This change, known as the DTV transition, was mandated by the U.S. Congress and will provide many benefits to the public, including more spectrums for use by public safety (policy, fire and emergency rescue workers).

This transition likely will not be noticed by most people who subscribe to cable or satellite services, since those companies will be adapting their signal "boxes."

However, consumers with analog television sets will have to take action in order to continue to receive a television signal if they are hooked up to either a rooftop antenna or "rabbit ears."

I am concerned that this transition may disproportionately affect seniors because they are more likely to have an older, analog television, less likely to be connected to cable or satellite, and less likely to have purchased a new, digital-ready TV.

So the Office on Aging is already working with the FCC, the South Carolina Broadcaster's Association and the cable industry to help make this a smooth transition.

We want to get the word out that every household is entitled to two \$40 coupons to help purchase up to two converter boxes through a program administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). Coupons may be requested from www.dtv2009.gov or by calling 888-DTV-2009.

If you have any further questions about how this transition will affect you, please call the Office on Aging toll-free at 800-868-9095 and will help you in any way we can.