

Digital Television Conversion is Coming – Are You Ready?

Question: I recently tried to get a coupon for a digital television converter from DTV2009.gov and had to put my name on a waiting list. It seems every time I turn on the television I see a commercial telling me to act now or my screen will be blank on February 18, 2009. Is the switch still going to occur and will I be able to get a coupon?

Answer: The switch to digital broadcast mandated for February 17, 2009 is still slated to go through, though it is possible that it may now be delayed at the request of the Obama administration. What I will advise you to do is get a converter box as soon as possible. Regardless of the actual date that the transition does occur, the switch will happen.

As of the first of the year, funds for the original coupon program had been depleted, and those who had not already received their coupons for converter boxes began being placed on a waiting list. I have been told that as soon as funds are available coupons would be sent to those on the waiting list, so it is best to get on the list so you are not too far down the line.

When your coupon does arrive, make sure to purchase your converter in a timely manner, because it expires after 90 days. It is being suggested that individuals whose coupon(s) have expired ask family, friends and neighbors if they have an extra, as you will not be able to request a replacement for your household.

One of the important things to remember about the digital transition is that only those who get their broadcast signal through an antenna or rabbit ears on older analog televisions will be affected. If your television is a newer model with a digital receiver or you have cable or satellite service you should see no change when the transition occurs.

I recently saw a demonstration by the South Carolina Broadcasters Association of how the converter boxes worked, and was impressed by how much better the picture quality was with a digital signal. The converter boxes also have a program guide, among other features, that lets you know what programs will be coming on each channel for the next several hours.

The converter is fairly small, and it appeared that connecting the antenna to the converter and the converter to a television was fairly simple. If you need information on how to install your converter box you can go to www.dtvanswers.com, where they have a video on converter box installation. If you don't have access to the internet, you can always call your local broadcaster and ask for advice on hooking it up. It is not likely that they will have anyone available to come to your home and help you, but somebody should be able to explain the process to you.

If you have questions regarding senior issues, please contact the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging at 803-734-9900 or toll free outside the Columbia area at 800-868-9095 or visit our website www.aging.sc.gov.

