

February, 2009

DEADLINE FOR DIGITAL ONLY PROGRAMMING IS EXTENDED

Congress has approved Senate Bill [352](#) and with it a four-month delay in the conversion from analog to digital television programming. Supporters cited the large number of households thought to be unprepared for the February 17, 2009 switch to digital signals, as well as requests from consumer groups and even the Administration; the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [acknowledged](#) that consumer call centers showed a dire need for an extension.

President Barack Obama has said he will sign the DTV Delay Act once it lands on his desk, thus providing consumers more time and resources to aid in the switch to digital programming.

This is the second extension of the conversion to digital signals, and some skeptics think it may not be the last. If this current extension holds, on June 12 broadcasters will be required by law to turn off their analog signals, and consumers with analog televisions will need a converter box or cable/satellite services to get broadcasts.

Adding to the general confusion about the conversion (i.e., who could be impacted; is a new television necessary; what stations will come through after the switch is made) is the fact that the Commerce Department's program designed to provide analog households with coupons for converter boxes is out of money. Some estimates are that more than three million consumers are on a waiting list for these coupons; funding for coupons is included in the stimulus package currently before Congress.

Delaying implementation to digital signals impedes clearing airwave space that would be used by emergency responders and commercial wireless services. For now, many broadcasters are spending extra money to keep both analog and digital signals running simultaneously. Other impacts of the delay mean that localities planning to use what would have been freed-up analog airwaves to create emergency response radio systems for police, firefighters, and first responders will have to delay testing of these new systems until broadcasters have vacated the airwaves.

However, Acting FCC Chairman Michael J. Copps, [commenting](#) on the Congressional passage of the DTV Delay Act, stated:

I welcome Congressional passage of the DTV Delay Act. It has long been clear to me--and it's even clearer since I became Acting FCC Chairman two weeks ago--that the country is not prepared to undertake a nationwide transition in twelve days without unacceptably high consumer dislocation.

The additional four months provided by the law affords urgently-needed time for a more phased transition, including a consumer-friendly converter box coupon program, stepped-up consumer outreach and support--particularly for vulnerable populations--and dealing with coverage, antenna and reception issues that went too long unaddressed.

We've got a lot of work to do, but thanks to great leadership in the Senate and House of Representatives, we now have an opportunity to do it better.