

## **Providing Interoperability to Our First Responders: Expediting the Digital Television (DTV) Transition**

*Courtesy: House Committee on Energy and Commerce*

*As part of the Deficit Reduction Act, Congress establishes February 17, 2009 as the hard date for the transition from analog television to digital television - providing firemen, police and other first responders with the ability to better communicate, achieving critical interoperability. As a result analog televisions will need a digital-to-analog converter box to receive digital television signals.*

### **Making Communities Safer**

- Some police, fire departments, and rescue squads already have radio equipment to communicate over the spectrum the broadcasters are supposed to return—they are just awaiting the turnover.
- Many more public safety officials cannot purchase equipment or begin planning without a date certain.
- Last year, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (or 9-11 Commission) recommended the expedited return of this radio spectrum for public safety purposes.

### **Bringing New Services to Consumers and Lowering Prices**

- The commercial uses for the spectrum are practically limitless, such as accelerated deployment of wireless broadband capabilities (especially to rural areas) and more competitive choices for high-speed voice, video and data applications.

### **DTV Provisions in the Conference Report on the Deficit Reduction Act**

- The conference report establishes a February 17, 2009 hard deadline for the end of analog broadcasting, freeing critical spectrum for public safety and wireless broadband use, and is expected to generate at least \$10 billion in auction revenues.
- Most consumers should be unaffected by the February 17, 2009 deadline, and will not need an over-the-air converter box.
  - Less than 15 percent of households rely exclusively on over-the-air broadcasts.
  - The remaining 85 percent subscribe to a multichannel video programming distributor (MVPD), such as a cable or satellite operator. Cable and satellite operators can convert digital broadcast programming to analog-viewable format for these households.
- To help non-MVPD subscribers who wish to continue receiving broadcast programming over the air, the bill authorizes the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to create a digital-to-analog converter box program.

- The conference report allocates up to \$990 million for the program, which will enable households that make an affirmative request to receive by U.S. mail up to two, \$40 converter-box coupons. This will help minimize participation by consumers who do not need a subsidized converter-box.
- The NTIA may use up to \$100 million of the \$990 million for administrative costs. Up to \$5 million of the administrative funds may be used to educate consumers about the digital television transition and the digital-to-analog converter-box program.
- If NTIA certifies to Congress that it needs more money to fulfill the program, the overall amount available increases to up to \$1.5 billion and the administrative amount available increases to up to \$160 million.
- The conference report also makes up to \$1 billion available for a grant program to help public safety agencies obtain and deploy interoperable communications systems.

#####