



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Telecommunications and
Information Administration
Washington, D.C. 20230

NOV 18 2008

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
Chairman
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Markey:

Thank you for your co-signed letter of November 7, 2008, regarding the efforts being undertaken by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to ensure that consumers are educated about the transition to digital television (DTV), specifically with respect to several key lessons learned in the Wilmington, North Carolina test. I appreciate the opportunity to provide NTIA's input on these matters and enclose with this letter responses to your and Chairman Dingell's specific questions.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Jim Wasilewski, NTIA's Director of Congressional Affairs, at (202) 482-1551.

Sincerely,

Meredith Attwell Baker
Acting Assistant Secretary for
Communications and Information

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Cliff Stearns, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet
Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Responses of Acting Assistant Secretary
Meredith Attwell Baker
to Questions Posed by Chairman Dingell and Chairman Markey
November 18, 2008**

RESCANNING CONVERTER BOXES

Q: What is NTIA doing, or what, specifically, does it intend to do to let viewers, including viewers without ready access to the Internet, know that they need to rescan their digital-to-analog converter boxes after February 17, 2009?

Answer: NTIA's immediate priority with respect to consumer education is to urge consumers who rely exclusively on over-the-air reception of TV signals, and who choose to purchase a converter box to retain use of their analog television(s), to apply for their coupons immediately—at the very latest by the end of the year—to ensure they have time to prepare for the transition before February 17, 2009. If these consumers fail to apply for their converter box coupons and purchase their converter boxes in a timely manner, they could possibly lose television service after the analog shut-off. Specifically, as described further below, and based largely on lessons learned from Wilmington, North Carolina, NTIA launched a new phase of its consumer education campaign on September 30, 2008, intended to mobilize consumers who need to take action to do so well in advance of February 17, 2009. Called “Apply, Buy, and Try,” this campaign urges consumers who wish to use a converter box to keep their over-the-air analog television sets working after the nationwide analog shut-off to allow themselves at least six weeks to apply for their coupons, buy the box that meets their needs and try the box as soon as they get it home to troubleshoot potential problems.

NTIA shares the Committee's concern that consumers utilizing converter boxes should be aware of the need to scan for channels when they install their box, and to rescan after February 17, 2009. In fact, a key message point of NTIA's current “Apply, Buy and Try” campaign is impressing upon consumers the need to install their converter box as soon as possible, including scanning for channels, so that they can be fully prepared for the transition and have time to troubleshoot any potential problems. As we approach the transition date, NTIA will evaluate its messaging in this regard to ensure its effectiveness and to refocus on the need to *rescan* for channels after February 17th. Since digital stations are continually coming on air, it is important for consumers to know that they should rescan on a periodic basis to get all of the digital programming available. Notably, digital televisions that rely on over-the-air reception also need to be rescanned for available channels. NTIA will continue its successful strategy of leveraging the work of its many partners – such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA), public broadcasters and private stakeholders – to promote the availability of consumer-friendly tools and consistent messaging to help viewers understand the channel scanning issue.

To that end, NTIA is very pleased that the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) on November 10, 2008, launched a new Public Service Announcement (PSA) that, among other things, prompts consumers to scan for channels when setting up their converter boxes. NTIA would expect the NAB and local broadcasters, through news coverage of the digital transition and use of crawls, to continue to provide consumers with timely guidance, including reminders in the lead-up to February 17 of the need to rescan channels after the analog service is shut off.

ANTENNA ISSUES

1. **If a viewer cannot receive certain local digital signals using a digital-to-analog converter box, how is that viewer supposed to determine that she needs to obtain a new antenna or adjust an existing antenna to correct the problem?**

Answer: Reception issues are local in nature and are best addressed at the local level by television broadcasters, consumer electronics retailers, and other local experts, such as antenna installation companies. Consumers who cannot receive certain channels should be urged to call these local resources, which are in the best position to identify a consumer's specific problem and suggest a course of action to correct the problem. NTIA will also continue to refer consumers to the FCC's antenna tip sheet, available at www.dtv.gov, as it provides very useful, step-by-step troubleshooting advice for consumers, suggesting they make adjustments with their existing antenna to receive their favorite stations before resorting to making a new antenna purchase.

2. **What is NTIA doing, or what, specifically, does it intend to do to let viewers, including viewers without ready access to the Internet, know that they may need to obtain a new antenna or adjust an existing antenna to receive over-the-air signals after February 17, 2009?**

Answer: As mentioned above, based largely on lessons learned from Wilmington, North Carolina, on September 30, 2008, NTIA launched its new "Apply, Buy and Try" consumer education campaign expressly to mobilize consumers who need to take action to do so well in advance of February 17, 2009. This campaign urges consumers to allow themselves at least six weeks to take the following three steps:

1. Consumers who have not already applied for coupons should **APPLY** today;
2. Consumers should research available converter boxes and **BUY** the box that meets their needs; and
3. Consumers should **TRY** the box as soon as they get it home to troubleshoot potential problems, such as reception or set-up difficulties.

For consumers who do find that they have reception or installation difficulties, there are multiple resources and tools that have been developed by the FCC, NTIA, and private-sector partners to provide consumers with technical assistance. NTIA's consumer education materials encourage consumers to call the toll-free number 1-888-CALL-FCC, as well as their local broadcast stations, because these are the best sources of information and guidance on reception-related issues. NTIA provides contact information for these resources on its Web site and in materials distributed to the public, including its "Apply, Buy, and Try" brochure, a copy of which is enclosed.

SIGNAL CONTOUR ISSUES

- 1. If a viewer cannot receive certain local digital signals using a digital-to-analog converter box, how is that viewer supposed to determine that this is because the station's digital contour is smaller or coverage in certain areas is weaker than its analog signal contour and coverage strength? In other words, how will the viewer know that she resides within the analog signal contour, but outside the digital signal contour?**

Answer: The FCC and local broadcasters are in the best position to address consumers' reception problems, including those issues arising as a result of a consumer residing outside of the coverage area of a digital signal. NTIA is also referring consumers to the FCC's hotline, 1-888-CALL-FCC, because the FCC would be in a position, at least at a high level, to provide guidance to consumers as to what course of action they might consider if they want to try to receive signals along the periphery of coverage areas.

- 2. What are stations whose digital signal coverage areas are smaller than their analog signal coverage areas doing, or what, specifically, do they intend to do to let affected viewers, including affected viewers without ready access to the Internet, know that they should expect to lose a particular station's signal after the DTV transition because the station's digital signal contour is smaller than its analog signal contour?**

Answer: NTIA strongly encourages the NAB to continue to work with its members to communicate to viewers about the signal contour issue. Through news coverage of the digital transition and smart use of crawls and snipes, broadcasters should continue to fully inform consumers about these issues so they do not lose viewers. NTIA further encourages broadcasters to work with consumer electronic retailers to perhaps provide in-store information for consumers to complement on-air announcements, providing useful reminders and tips, including rules of thumb for viewers who may be on the periphery of a digital viewing area.

Consumer Guide to the TV Converter Box Coupon Program

3 Steps – 6 Weeks



If you rely on a rooftop antenna or 'rabbit ears,' a TV converter box is one option to transition to digital television on or before February 17, 2009. The Federal government is offering all U.S. households up to two \$40 coupons to help pay for the cost of TV converter boxes. **APPLY TODAY** for your coupon, or before the end of the year.

To keep your analog TV working, follow these 3 steps, which may take at least 6 weeks:



Apply TODAY for your coupon, which will help you purchase a government certified converter box. Coupons are available on a first come, first served basis. To apply, go to www.DTV2009.gov, call 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), mail to PO Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208 or fax 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632).



Buy your coupon-eligible converter box. **COUPONS EXPIRE 90 days** after they are mailed. Expired coupons cannot be reissued or replaced. A list of retailers will come in the envelope with your coupons.



Try your converter box as soon as you get it home. Hook-up your converter box to start watching digital television or to troubleshoot potential problems. The converter box instructions may include a toll free line for help setting up your box. If you experience poor reception, contact your local television station. For general information about the DTV transition, visit www.DTV.gov or call 1-888-CALL-FCC (voice) or 1-888-TELL-FCC (TTY).



Produced by the U.S. Department of Commerce.