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Federal Communications Commission
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Washington, D. C. 20554

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FCC BEGINS PROCEEDING TO RESOLVE COMPATIBILITY AND COPY PROTECTION ISSUES INVOLVING DIGITAL TELEVISION RECEIVERS AND CABLE SYSTEMS

Washington - The FCC today began a proceeding to resolve outstanding issues regarding the compatibility between cable television systems and digital television receivers, set top boxes and other consumer electronics equipment.

In a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking adopted today, the Commission asked for comments on two unresolved cable compatibility issues: (1) how to label DTV receivers with different features, including the proper designation for receivers providing two-way interactive capability; and (2) licensing terms for copy protection technology.

The Commission said negotiations between the cable and consumer electronics industries had produced consensus on a wide range of issues. It cited the February 22, 2000, letter from cable television and consumer electronics industry representatives detailing agreements on technical requirements for direct connection of digital TV receivers to digital cable systems and on provision of tuning and program schedule information to support the navigation function including on-screen program guides.

The Commission said it had encouraged and facilitated industry discussions in the hope and belief that comprehensive market-driven solutions were attainable and were superior to a regulatory approach. It noted, however, that because the industries have not yet resolved the remaining labeling and copy protection issues, it was "reluctantly" initiating this rulemaking proceeding. It said further delay in resolving these outstanding issues could begin to have deleterious effects on the implementation of DTV and on the deployment of products and services that will benefit the American public.

It also said that if the interested parties reach a consensus before the Commission takes action, it may well become unnecessary for the Commission to adopt rules.

On the set labeling issue, the Commission asked for comment on how to describe digital television receivers with different capabilities to operate with digital cable television systems. One important distinction to draw is between receivers that are and are not equipped with the IEEE 1394 connector circuitry for interactive use. The Commission also asked for comment on whether the transition to digital requires any changes in FCC requirements for cable operators to offer supplemental equipment to subscribers to enable them to use special features of their digital TV receivers.

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On the copy protection issue, the Commission asked for comment on appropriate regulatory action, if any, with respect to copy protection technology licensing. The Commission said it was focusing on hardware and compatibility standards generally, and asked for comment on the hardware implications of copy protection. It also noted that the FCC's navigation devices rules place limits on the licensing terms that multichannel-video programming distributors can impose on manufacturers of navigation devices. The Commission asked for comments on whether there are any unresolved point-of-deployment technology licensing issues, including conformance with the navigation devices rules, related to copy protection.

In addition to the labeling and copy protection compatibility issues, the Commission asked for comments on how compatibility decisions could enhance implementation of closed captioning standards. It also asked for comments on whether compatibility choices would have an effect on compliance with Section 255 of the Communications Act, which requires that telecommunications equipment and services be accessible to persons with disabilities.

Action by the Commission by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC No. 00-137, Office of Plans and Policy Docket No. 00-67

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