



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

News media Information 202 / 418-0500
Fax-On-Demand 202 / 418-2830
TTY 202/418-2555
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
<ftp.fcc.gov>

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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News Media Contact:
Michelle Russo at (202) 418-2358

FCC IMPLEMENTS THREE MORE SHVIA REQUIREMENTS *Actions Related to Consumer Access to Distant TV Signals via Satellite*

Washington, DC – The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) today implemented three requirements related to consumers' eligibility to receive distant TV signals via satellite. These requirements were set forth by the Satellite Home Viewer Improvement Act (SHVIA), enacted on November 29, 1999. Today, the FCC began an inquiry to determine if the signal standard used for eligibility status should be modified. The FCC also improved the computer model for predicting signal intensity to determine eligibility for receiving distant TV signals via satellite. Finally, the FCC designated an "independent and neutral entity" to designate who conducts eligibility tests at consumers' homes.

The SHVIA generally seeks to place satellite carriers on an equal footing with local cable television operators when it comes to the availability of broadcast programming. Each of the three actions adopted today serves the goals of SHVIA by giving consumers more and better choices in selecting among the options for video delivery service.

Grade B Signal Intensity Standard

The SHVIA also authorizes satellite carriers to provide distant broadcast programming to eligible subscribers. A household is eligible to receive distant TV signals via satellite if it can not receive a signal of Grade B intensity using a conventional outdoor TV antenna. The existing Grade B signal intensity standard has long been used within the television broadcast industry.

In the SHVIA, Congress asked the FCC to consider whether this standard should be modified or replaced for the purpose of determining eligibility to receive distant signals via satellite. The FCC is not considering alteration of the Grade B standard for any purpose other than determining eligibility to receive retransmitted distant network signals. Generally, if a household receives a television signal of Grade B intensity, it should receive an acceptable television picture at least 90% of the time. More specifically, Grade B represents a field strength that is strong enough, in the absence of man-made noise or interference from other stations, to provide a television picture that the average observer would classify as "acceptable."

In today's *Notice of Inquiry*, the FCC is seeking information and comment on all technical parameters that scientifically could be considered to affect the quality of over-the-air reception of television pictures. The FCC also seeks comment on an appropriate eligibility standard for distant digital signals. SHVIA requires the FCC to complete this inquiry within one year of enactment of the law and the Commission will submit its findings in a report to Congress.

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Improvement of the ILLR predictive model

The FCC adopted rules to improve the computer model that predicts signal intensity at a household for the purpose of determining eligibility for receiving distant network television broadcast signals via satellite. The improved model now includes signal propagation effects of terrain, building structures and land cover variations.

In February 1999, the FCC created the Individual Location Longley-Rice (ILLR) computer model to predict whether households are served or unserved. In adopting this model, the FCC recognized the need to account for vegetation and buildings as part of the model and asked the affected parties to provide guidance on how to incorporate these factors.

In the SHVIA, Congress codified the ILLR model and recognized as the FCC had in creating it, that the model should account for “terrain, building structures and other land cover variations.” In today’s *First Report and Order*, the Commission improves the prediction technique to more accurately determine the ability of individual households to receive television signals broadcast over-the-air by local stations. Television station licensees, Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) operators, and other Direct to Home (DTH) Satellite operators may use the technique to establish the eligibility of individual households for satellite delivery of distant television programming. The model is usually used at the time the satellite equipment is sold or when a customer contacts a satellite company to determine eligibility for distant signal reception.

The improved prediction technique will take into account vegetation and other land cover by using the land use and land cover (LULC) database provided by the United States Geological Survey. The LULC database assigns locations into one of ten categories ranging from open land to urban environments. The predictions will then be adjusted based on propagation effects associated with the appropriate land cover feature.

In addition to improving the predictive model, the FCC is allowing for the model’s continued refinement by the use of additional data as they become available. Refinements based on such additional data may be proposed by referencing the docket of this proceeding, which will be held open for this purpose.

Designation of an “independent and neutral entity”

In its *Order*, the FCC also designated the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) as the “independent and neutral entity” that can designate the person to conduct a signal strength test at a subscriber’s household. The SHVIA establishes procedures whereby broadcast stations can grant waivers to satellite subscribers who are predicted to be able to receive local network station signals off-the-air, and therefore are ineligible to receive distant signals via satellite. The SHVIA also provides that if waivers are denied, consumers can request a signal test to determine the actual signal strength received at their homes.

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If the broadcast station and the satellite provider cannot agree on who should conduct the test, the ARRL will designate someone to conduct the test. The FCC determined that the ARRL is a particularly appropriate choice for this role because it has no commercial connection with delivery of television services, it has field offices across the U.S., and its members are actively engaged in activities related to the measurement of radio field intensity. The *Order* outlines how to contact ARRL.

Action by the Commission, May 22, 2000, by First Report and Order (FCC 00-185).
Chairman Kennard, Commissioners Ness, Furchtgott-Roth, Powell and Tristani.

Action by the Commission, May 22, 2000, by Notice of Inquiry (FCC 00-184).
Chairman Kennard, Commissioners Ness, Furchtgott-Roth, Powell and Tristani.

Comment deadlines for Notice of Inquiry on Grade B signal intensity standard:

Comments due: June 27, 2000

Reply comments due: July 12, 2000

Office of Engineering and Technology contacts: Robert Eckert at (202) 418-2433, Charles Iseman at (202) 418-2444.

ET Docket No. 00-11 (ILLR model and neutral entity)

ET Docket No. 00-90 (Grade B Signal)

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For more information on the FCC's implementation of the Satellite Home Viewer Improvement Act, visit the FCC web site (www.fcc.gov/csb)