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Federal Communications Commission
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FCC ADOPTS TECHNICAL STANDARDS FOR DISPLAY OF CLOSED CAPTIONING ON DIGITAL TELEVISION RECEIVERS

Washington--The Federal Communications Commission today amended its rules to require closed captioning display capability in digital television receivers. This action ensures that closed captioning services will continue to be available to consumers as the transition from analog to digital broadcasting progresses.

Closed captioning is an assistive technology that allows persons with hearing disabilities to access television programming. Captioning displays the audio portion of programming as text superimposed over the video. Closed captioning information is encoded and transmitted along with the video signal of television broadcasts. In order to display closed captions, viewers must use either a set-top decoder or a television receiver with integrated decoder circuitry.

In 1990, Congress passed the Television Decoder Circuitry Act. The Act requires that television receivers with picture screens 13 inches or larger contain built-in decoder circuitry designed to display closed captioned television transmissions. The Act also requires the FCC to ensure that closed captioning services continue to be available to consumers as new technology is developed. In 1991, the FCC amended its rules to include standards for the display of closed captioned text on analog television receivers. The development of digital broadcasting requires that the FCC again update its rules to fulfill its obligations under the Act.

In the Report and Order adopted today, the FCC incorporated sections of industry standard EIA-708-B, "Digital Television (DTV) Closed Captioning" into its rules. The standard provides instructions for the encoding, delivery, and display of closed captioning information for digital television systems. The Commission said that it would require manufacturers to include compliant DTV closed captioning decoder circuitry in DTV devices by July 1, 2002. Devices covered under the rules include DTV sets with integrated "widescreen" displays measuring at least 7.8 inches vertically, DTV sets with conventional displays measuring at least 13 inches vertically, and stand-alone DTV tuners, whether or not they are marketed with display screens.

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The Report and Order contains provisions that will allow viewers to choose and alter the color, size, and font of their captioning and to choose between multiple streams of captioning, such as "easy reader" or alternate language captioning. The Commission said that requiring decoders to be able to respond to these various features is necessary to ensure that closed captioning will be accessible for the greatest number of persons who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The Order requires that cable providers and other multichannel video programming distributors transmit captions in a format that will be understandable to the decoder circuitry in digital television receivers.

As provided for in the Commission's rules establishing requirements for the closed captioning of video programming adopted in a 1997 Order, programming prepared or formatted for display on digital television receivers before the compliance date of the decoder circuitry rules adopted today is considered "pre-rule" programming. As stated above, this order establishes the compliance date as July 1, 2002. Therefore, programming prepared or formatted for display on digital television after that date will be considered new programming. The existing rules require an increasing amount of captioned new programming over an eight-year transition period with 100% of all new nonexempt programming required to be captioned by January 1, 2006.

Action by the Commission on July 21, 2000, by Report and Order (FCC # 00-259.) Chairman Kennard, Commissioners Ness, Powell and Tristani, with Commissioner Furchtgott-Roth concurring in part and dissenting in part.

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ET Docket No. 99-254, MM Docket No. 95-176

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**SUMMARY OF FCC ORDER ON CLOSED CAPTIONING
REQUIREMENTS FOR DIGITAL TELEVISION RECEIVERS**

1. Decoder Operation

The Order adopts the requirement of Section 9 of EIA-708, with the following modifications:

- Decoders must support the standard, large, and small caption sizes and must allow the caption provider to choose a size and allow the viewer to choose an alternative size.
- Decoders must support the eight fonts listed in EIA-708. Caption providers may specify 1 of these 8 font styles to be used to write caption text. Decoders must include the ability for consumers to choose among the eight fonts. The decoder must display the font chosen by the caption provider unless the viewer chooses a different font.
- Decoders must implement the same 8 character background colors as those that Section 9 requires be implemented for character foreground (white, black, red, green, blue, yellow, magenta and cyan).
- Decoders must implement options for altering the appearance of caption character edges.
- Decoders must display the color chosen by the caption provider, and must allow viewers to override the foreground and/or background color chosen by the caption provider and select alternate colors.
- Decoders must be capable of decoding and processing data for the six standard services, but information from only one service need be displayed at a given time.
- Decoders must include an option that permits a viewer to choose a setting that will display captions as intended by the caption provider (a default). Decoders must also include an option that allows a viewer's chosen settings to remain until the viewer chooses to alter these settings, including during periods when the television is turned off.
- Cable providers and other multichannel video programming distributors must transmit captions in a format that will be understandable to this decoder circuitry in digital cable television sets when transmitting programming to digital television devices.

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2. Covered Devices

- All digital television receivers with picture screens in the 4:3 aspect ratio measuring at least 13 inches diagonally, digital television receivers with picture screens in the 16:9 aspect ratio measuring 7.8 inches or larger vertically (this size corresponds to the vertical height of an analog receiver with a 13 inch diagonal), and all DTV tuners, shipped in interstate commerce or manufactured in the United States must comply with the minimum decoder requirements we are adopting here.
- The rules apply to DTV tuners whether or not they are marketed with display screens.
- Converter boxes used to display digital programming on analog receivers must deliver the encoded “analog” caption information to the attached analog receiver.

3. Compliance Dates

- Manufacturers must begin to include DTV closed caption functionality in DTV devices in accordance with the rules adopted in the Order by July 1, 2002.
- As provided for in the Commission's rules establishing requirements for the closed captioning of video programming adopted in a 1997 Order, programming prepared or formatted for display on digital television receivers before the compliance date of the decoder circuitry rules adopted today is considered "pre-rule" programming. As stated above, this order establishes that date as July 1, 2002. Therefore, programming prepared or formatted for display on digital television after that date will be considered new programming. The existing rules require an increasing amount of captioned new programming over an eight-year transition period with 100% of all new nonexempt programming required to be captioned by January 1, 2006.