



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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Preparations in High Gear for Stations Going All-Digital This Week ***FCC Seeks to Protect Access to Analog News and Emergency Information***

Washington, D.C. – With 421 television stations still planning to terminate analog broadcasts on Tuesday, the Federal Communications Commission, broadcasters and others are working overtime to prepare consumers for the digital transition – and to try to ensure that consumers who aren't ready for the switch will continue to have access to vital television news and emergency information.

Of the nation's nearly 1,800 full-power television stations, 220 will have terminated their analog signals before Tuesday and another 421 will terminate their analog signals on Tuesday before 11:59 pm, for a total of 641 stations, or about 36% of all full-power stations nationwide. The FCC has dispatched staffers to 72 markets across the nation where the impact is expected to be the greatest, while broadcasters who are shutting down analog signals intensify efforts to notify and educate the public.

“This is not just about whether people can watch their favorite reality show,” said Acting FCC Chairman Michael Copps. “It’s about whether consumers have access to vital emergency alerts, weather, news and public affairs.”

Finding that the public was not ready for the transition to digital television, Congress earlier this month delayed the deadline for termination of analog signals from February 17 to June 12. But Congress also directed the FCC to give broadcasters the flexibility to make the transition early, including on the original February 17 date.

The FCC is seeking to ensure that even where all or most stations in a market are terminating analog service, consumers who are unprepared for the switch will continue to have access to critical local news and emergency information. To accomplish this, the FCC examined each market in which stations planned to end analog service to try to ensure that at least one affiliate of the four major networks – ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC – would continue broadcasting in analog after February 17. Many had such a station, but in those instances in which there would be no top-four affiliate remaining in a market, the FCC attempted to ensure that analog local news and emergency information would remain available—generally through what is being called “enhanced analog nightlight” service. Under “enhanced analog nightlight,” the top-four

affiliates must keep at least one analog signal on the air to provide programming that includes, at a minimum, local news and emergency information.

“We are trying to make the best of a difficult situation,” Copps said. “While this staggered transition is confusing and disruptive for some consumers, the confusion and disruption would have been far worse had we gone ahead with a nationwide transition on Tuesday.”

“Remember where we were little more than a week ago,” Copps explained. “We potentially had all 1,800 full-power stations seeking to terminate analog service on February 17. Then the major network owned-and-operated stations, along with some of the major group owners, stepped up and declared that they would keep their analog signals on the air. Those decisions undoubtedly had a restraining effect on the other stations in their markets. Of the stations that told us they still planned to terminate on February 17, we identified 106 stations in 41 markets as being particularly problematic. Within the last few days, 43 of those stations reconsidered their decision and will stay on the air with analog service. That reduced the number of problematic markets from 41 to 20. With respect to those remaining markets, we have attempted to ensure that analog viewers continue to have access to local news and vital emergency information. I recount these numbers not to minimize the potential consumer disruption that is about to occur, but to recognize that the scope is far less than it might have been.”

While FCC staffers have conducted DTV outreach in every television market in the country, this week they will specifically target 72 markets where one or more of the top-four network affiliates are dropping analog broadcasts. In the coming days, staff will visit stores in those key markets to assess the availability of digital converter boxes, distribute key “how to” information for consumers making the switch, and assist in DTV walk-in centers where consumers can get hands-on transition assistance. Outreach continues to be targeted to consumers most at risk: senior citizens, low income families, people living in rural and tribal areas, non-English speakers, and the disabled.

The FCC has also boosted staffing in consumer call centers, providing 2,506 information specialists to answer consumer questions about the transition and an additional 1,759 agents through industry partners. All calls will be routed through a single number, 1-888-CALLFCC, and agents will have the ability to refer callers to local contacts for information regarding particular reception issues.

The Commission has also provided new web resources to help consumers address digital reception problems. Information and a DTV reception map that allow consumers to check reception at their own homes are available at <http://www.dtv.gov/fixreception.html>.

Broadcasters continue to have the most critical role in educating their viewers about the transition. In addition to extensive on-air efforts, many local stations have engineers and employees devoting significant time to helping individual viewers resolve their transition problems.

“We applaud broadcasters who have worked with us—and who have worked together—as we scramble to best serve the public under this new law,” Copps added. “We also applaud broadcasters who are continuing to provide analog service through June 12, which is the surest way to make sure that viewers have time to prepare. And we applaud our FCC volunteers who have had to be away from their homes and families for extended periods in order to make this transition as smooth as possible for their fellow citizens,” Copps said.

Attached is a complete list of all full-power stations, with those making the transition on or before February 17 in bold type.

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News about the Federal Communications Commission can also be found on the Commission's web site www.fcc.gov.