

NEWS

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Contact: Laurie Petrie, Communications Director, 513-345-3393

Many seniors facing difficulties with digital TV conversion

As the deadline nears for the Feb. 17 conversion to digital TV, it's clear that many vulnerable and low-income seniors are going to need extra help. Some efforts are underway, but resources are stretched thin and efforts may not go far enough.

At 7:30 p.m. on Dec. 17, broadcasters nationwide will "soft test" the digital transmission system for five minutes. "Whoever is watching at that time on a 'rabbit ears' TV will find out that they're not ready," said Scott Radcliffe of the Federal Communications Commission.

Radcliffe is in Southwestern Ohio working on outreach for the TV conversion.

A Nielson survey in Feb. 2007, estimated that 20-25 percent of the households in the southwestern Ohio counties of Hamilton, Clermont and Clinton had broadcast-only television reception. This is a higher percentage than most other Ohio counties. (Households with paid TV service such as via cable or satellite will not be affected by the digital conversion.)

Problems for vulnerable seniors include:

- Lack of awareness about the conversion or understanding of whether they need a converter box or not.
- Inability to get through on the busy toll free telephone line to get a converter box coupon. (1-888-388-2009) Applications are also available online at www.DTV2009.gov, but many seniors, especially those with low incomes, do not have computers or are unable to navigate the Web. (People should know that they can also apply by mail to PO Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208.)
- Inability to afford a converter box, even with the help of a coupon.
- Expired coupons (coupons expire after 90 days and you can't re-apply).
- No transportation to a store where a converter box can be purchased.
- Inability to connect the converter box to their analog TV, carry out the installation instructions or test the operation.
- Very old televisions with antennas that attach to the TV via two screws. With this type of antenna, an adapter is needed before the converter box will work. Adapters are available at electronics stores or departments.

Some efforts underway in our area:

- Council on Aging sent information flyers to more than 14,000 home-care clients and has encouraged care managers and provider agencies to let seniors know about the converter box coupons.
- Scott Radcliffe of FCC has been in Southwestern Ohio organizing outreach efforts and events. Two events coming up next week are:
 - **Dec. 16, 11 a.m. at Bond Hill Recreation Center, 1501 Elizabeth Place**
 - **Dec. 18, 1 p.m. at Mason Community Center, 6050 Mason Montgomery Road**

Converter box coupons will be available at the events, along other information and demonstrations of how to hook up the converter box.

Radcliffe said he will return to our area in January and welcomes requests from groups for additional events. He can be reached at 202-503-0875 or scottradcliffe@fcc.gov

“We find there’s often a senior in an area who knows how to hook up the converter box and is helping his neighbors, so we do a ‘train the trainer’ approach,” Radcliffe said.

- Senior centers have been providing help via education events, assistance over the telephone, and in limited cases, help installing converter boxes. Southwestern Ohio senior centers offering assistance include:
 - Hyde Park Center for Older Adults
 - Middletown Senior Center
 - Partners in Prime (Hamilton, OH)
 - Sycamore Senior Center
 - Wilmington Savings Bank – Clinton County Senior Center

This week, the U.S. Administration on Aging participated in a 25-agency meeting hosted by the Commerce Department’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The purpose was to further coordinate efforts to educate vulnerable Americans about the conversion.

Also, this week, Radcliffe spoke via conference calls with local broadcasters. They plan to set up a phone bank and 800 number where people can call on Feb. 17 if they find themselves unable to get TV reception.

“The broadcasters recognize that despite all the efforts they’ve made to get information out to people, they are going to be bombarded on Feb. 17th,” Radcliffe said. “Phoenix did a test with their local television stations and they were bombarded with 13,000 calls.”

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More details below

Step 1: Apply.

Apply for a coupon now. Coupons are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Consumers can apply for coupons online at www.DTV2009.gov, by phone at 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), by fax at 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632) or by mail to PO Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208. Deaf or hard of hearing callers may dial 1-877-530-2634 (English TTY) or 1-866-495-1161 (Spanish TTY).

Step 2: Buy.

Consumers should buy their converter boxes soon after their coupons arrive in the mail. Consumers will receive a list of participating local, phone and online retailers with their coupons. TV viewers are urged to make their choice before the end of the year.

Step 3: Try.

Once a consumer has purchased a converter box, they should connect the box to their analog TV immediately and follow the installation, and channel scanning instructions, and antenna adjustments, if needed. This provides the opportunity to test the converter box and troubleshoot potential problems prior to the transition date. Most importantly, consumers can start enjoying the benefits of a clearer picture and more programming choices now, so don't wait to install your converter box.

About Council on Aging

Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio (COA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for older adults and their families.

Since 1974, COA has been designated by the state of Ohio as the Area Agency on Aging for Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Hamilton and Warren counties. COA plans, coordinates, funds and administers programs for an area that is home to more than 252,000 adults age 60 and older.

COA promotes choice, independence, dignity and well-being of older adults through a range of services that help them remain in their homes for as long as possible.

One call to COA links people to the wide variety of agencies, information and programs that serve older adults.

For Answers on Aging:

Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio
175 Tri County Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45246
513-721-1025 Toll-free 1-800-252-0155
E-mail: info@help4seniors.org.
Website: www.help4seniors.org