

THE FUTURE OF HOW WE SEE TELEVISION

If you were ever to sit around the lunch table at the Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity Headquarters, you would hear conversations that cover a myriad of topics. From politics to sports to travel to current events, the staff members at the Fraternity Headquarters delve into one or more of them every day.

One day during the Fall of 2007, a conversation started about how on February 17, 2009, all televisions would need to be able to capture digital signals, or they would be dark. Each person around the table had a different idea of what was actually going to take place, which led the Fraternity's Director of Finance, Carol Arenstein, to say "this would

make an excellent *Carnation* article." After thinking about it for a while, it seems that Carol was right on target.

While many of us probably already have digital cable through our cable providers, for a number of us who don't, there is a lot to learn. Basically, all cable television providers will stop broadcasting on analog airwaves and begin to ONLY broadcast on digital airwaves on February 17, 2009. Below is more detailed information on how Delta Sigs can be prepared for this changeover.

Why is this happening?

According to FCC, the main government entity taking the lead on this changeover, the analog airwaves are being allocated for public service and advanced wireless services. Plus, with the digital spectrum being more efficient, digital provides better television picture and sound, as well as the ability for more programming options such as multicasting, which essentially allows digital TV providers to show more than one show on a channel at once – (one digital show on channel 7-1, another digital show on 7-2, another on 7-3, etc.)

So, essentially the reason this change is happening is to allow for more efficiency and for a more robust viewing experience for television viewers. In addition, it allows additional space for public service organizations like the police and fire departments to communicate effectively. As we all have seen with what happened on 9/11/01, efficient communication was desperately needed for our law enforcement communities.

How will this change affect those who use an antenna?

According to www.dtv.gov, the federal government's web site dedicated to the DTV Changeover, you won't be affected if



you have a digital television with an internal digital tuner, or a box from your cable company. However, if you have an analog television, you will need to get a digital-to-analog converter box.

“If you have one or more televisions that receive free over-the-air television programming (with a roof-top antenna or “rabbit ears” on the TV), the type of TV you own is very important. A digital television (a TV with an internal digital tuner) will allow you to continue to watch free over-the-air programming after February 17, 2009. However, if you have an analog television, you will need a digital-to-analog converter box to continue to watch broadcast television on that set. This converter box will also enable you to see any additional multi-cast programming that your local stations are offering.”

How does the digital-to-analog converter box work, and is there any assistance in paying for one?

The digital-to-analog box works to convert the digital signal that will be utilized after February 19 that is captured by your antenna to analog, so the televisions that only have analog signals can view broadcast television. It will allow these people the opportunity to not have to go out and buy a new television set, but to continue watching broadcast television, as well as the multicasting that will be available, on their current televisions. You will still need your antenna hooked up to receive the signal on these televisions, however.

Manufacturers say that the digital-to-analog converter boxes will cost between \$40 and \$70 at electronics retailers, and the government is offering a coupon program to help those who need to purchase these boxes. Again, according to www.dtv.gov, “The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), a part of the Department of Commerce, administers this program. Every U.S. household is eligible to receive up to two coupons, worth \$40 each, toward the purchase of eligible digital-to-analog converter boxes. Beginning in January of 2008, the NTIA has begun accepting applications for coupons. The coupons may only be used for eligible converter boxes sold at participating consumer electronics retailers, and the coupons must be used at the time of purchase.”

How does someone apply for the coupon to assist in purchasing a digital-to-analog converter box, and where can I purchase a converter box?

It will be easy to find a retailer who sells the digital-to-analog converter boxes, as the government will send you a list of local retailers when you send in your application for one of



the aforementioned coupons. As of July 2008, the following national retailers were selling the boxes:

- Best Buy
- Circuit City
- Kmart
- RadioShack
- Sears
- Target
- Wal-Mart

Due to the overwhelming desire and demand for the coupons, the number available is limited and applications for coupons must be received by March 31, 2009. Coupons may be requested in one of four ways:

1. Call the Coupon Program’s 24-hour hotline at 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009), TTY: 1-877-530-2634 (English TTY) or 1-866-495-1161 (Spanish TTY)
2. Apply online at www.dtv2009.gov
3. Mail a coupon application to PO Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000
4. Fax an application to 1-877-DTV-4ME2 (1-877-388-4632)

In statistics released by the TV Converter Box Coupon program, by June 30, 2008, there were already 18,876,620 coupons ordered. In June itself, there were 2.83 million requests for coupons.

The moral of the story – if you need to request a coupon for a converter box, do so soon so you aren’t shut out!

So, as we wrap up this story, we hope that you are a little more knowledgeable about the upcoming changeover to digital television. If you are using a cable provider, you’re likely fine, but you should check with them to be sure. If you’re not, it’s in your best interest to check your television to see if it has an internal digital tuner. If it doesn’t, get yourself a converter box so on February 19 when you go to watch your favorite show, you aren’t watching a blank screen instead!