

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Analog to Digital TV

Television transmission is my topic of the day. It might not sound like a legislative issue, but it is likely to become one next year when people wake up one morning and their television sets do not work. Anticipating that circumstance, broadcast industry and consumer representatives spent a day at the State House recently, informing legislators about the coming transition. So I am passing the information along to you.

If you watch television completely through cable or satellite access, you can skip the story because you will have no interruption to service. But any sets that lack those connections must meet new specifications in order to operate.

At midnight next February 17th, analog television broadcasting will just disappear. That means at 12:01 AM on February 18, 2009 the only broadcast coming over-the-air into your television antenna will be a pure digital signal. If your set cannot accept the digital signal, you won't even see the snowy image that comes in on unassigned stations today. The screen will be dark.

Broadcasters are calling this new reception result "the cliff". And if you have analog television that relies on an antenna, every station will fall off that cliff if you don't have the right hardware. Here's some information to help you make sure your broadcast television service continues on February 18th.

I went to the presentation with the impression that most newer televisions already accept the digital signal and learned that it's not necessarily so. I then checked a set in my home that I purchased in 2006 and found that it is analog only. Here is how to find out about your own television sets, according to the broadcasters.

All HDTV sets are digital-ready, but you do not need that designation in to have digital reception. Some sets proclaim their digital status on their face, but if yours does not, check the manual or back of the set. Look for the words "Integrated Digital Tuner," "Digital Tuner Built-In," or the letters "DTV," or "ATSC". If you do not find those terms, you will need to take action by next February. You have these three options.

First, you can sign up for satellite or cable service. Any set will operate through those connections.

Second, you can purchase new, digital ready sets. A cautionary note: I was warned at last week's meeting that some retailers continue to sell analog sets, so check to make sure your set is digital.

Third, you can choose to purchase a converter box to enable reception for your set. The boxes can be installed immediately, but they must be in place by February 18th. Congress established a coupon program that allows each household to receive up to two \$40 coupons to defray the cost, estimated at between \$40 and \$70 each. You can apply online at www.dtv2009.gov or by phoning 1-888-DTV-2009. My office has application forms if you prefer to mail or fax an application. Call me at 567-1661 if you would like to have one.

The federal government has worked all year to alert consumers of the coming television "cliff". Even so, there will be many individuals who wake next winter on February 18th and find they cannot see their morning television shows. Whether your program choice is *The Today Show* or *The View*, I hope you will make use of this information so you will have something to watch.