

Government Doles Out \$40 Coupons for DTV Conversion

By Bryan Gardiner [✉](#) January 02, 2008 | 2:03:19 – Wired News – wired.com

If you found yourself in front of a television during the holidays, you no doubt noticed [a handful of new commercials](#) focusing on the upcoming digital television conversion slated for Feb. 18, 2009. On that date, analog broadcasts will cease and those who don't have a digital set (and who still get programming via over-the-air antennas) will find themselves staring at a snowy screens as the industry moves to all digital broadcasting. That is, unless they buy a special digital converter box.

Thankfully, your friendly [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#) is here to help. Aided by the billions it's expected to rake in after this month's 700 MHz spectrum auction, the government officially started [issuing \\$40 coupons](#) on Wednesday to go toward the purchase of these conversion boxes.



And with millions of coupons now on hand, the NTIA says it will be issuing up to two per household. That's not bad considering the converter boxes themselves are expected to cost between \$50 and \$70 at local retailers.

Yet for some, digital conversion boxes are the least of their worries.

"Pulling the switch on stations all across the land at one and the same time in February 2009 is going to be a real throw of the dice," said FCC Commissioner Michael Copps [in a statement](#) (.pdf) on Wednesday.

Copps may be right. Casting aside the worry that the general public won't be ready for the conversion for a moment, there's also the fact that analog broadcasters must, by law, cease broadcasting in analog by 11:59 p.m. on Feb. 17, 2009 and in the interim construct facilities that will be capable of transmitting digital signals to viewers.

"Unfortunately, at this point, the transition will not be as smooth as it might have been," Copps continued. "Not every consumer will have access to all of their analog broadcast channels on February 17, 2009 and then wake up happily the next morning to those same stations in digital."

Instead, he says there will likely be a period of time -- perhaps before the transition date and almost certainly after -- in which some stations may not be able to provide service to all of their viewers. The FCC is hoping to remedy this by mandating regular status reports by broadcasters, but there are still no guarantees.

Nielsen estimates that a little over 14 million households in the U.S. still rely on over-the-air television for programming, or about 13 percent of the 113 million total television households in the nation. That's potentially a lot of unhappy viewers with subsidized digital converter boxes for digital broadcasts that may or may not be available. Nevertheless, to request your own coupon(s), head over to www.dtv2009.gov.