



Cable System Encryption

The Commission recently decided that cable operators with all-digital systems may encrypt their services. This will let cable operators activate and deactivate cable service without sending a technician to your home. If your cable operator chooses to encrypt its services, you will need a set-top box or CableCARD for every television set in your home on which you want to continue to view cable programming.

Why allow encryption?

Encryption of all-digital cable service will allow cable operators to activate and deactivate cable service remotely, thus relieving many consumers of the need to wait at home to receive a cable technician when they sign up for or cancel cable service, or expand service to an existing cable connection in their home. In addition, encryption will reduce service theft, which could reduce cable rates and often degrades the quality of cable service received by paying subscribers. Encryption also will reduce the number of service calls necessary for manual installations and disconnections, which can relieve traffic in urban areas and reduce carbon emissions.

What does this mean for cable subscribers?

If you are a cable subscriber, you should be aware:

- You may need additional equipment to receive cable service.

If you currently rely on unencrypted cable service to receive broadcast channels from your cable operator (*i.e.*, your digital television connects directly to the cable system without the addition of a set-top box or CableCARD), you will need a set-top box or CableCARD to continue to view those channels.

- If you need additional equipment due to encryption, you are entitled to free equipment for a limited time. The chart below gives the details of the free equipment terms.

If, at the time your cable operator begins to encrypt, you subscribe	Then you are entitled to
only to broadcast basic service and do not have a set-top box or CableCARD	a set-top box or CableCARD on up to two television sets without charge or service fee for two years from the date your cable operator begins to encrypt.
to a level of service other than broadcast basic service but use a digital television to receive only the basic service tier without use of a set-top box or CableCARD	a set-top box or CableCARD on one television set without charge or service fee for one year from the date your cable operator begins to encrypt.
only to the basic service tier without use of a set-top box or CableCARD and you receive Medicaid	a set-top box or CableCARD on up to two television sets without charge or service fee for five years from the date your cable operator begins to encrypt.



- Your cable operator must notify you at least 30 days before it begins to encrypt and notify you about the equipment to which you are entitled under Federal law.
- Your cable operator must notify you 30 to 60 days before the end of the free equipment period that your cable operator will begin to charge you for the equipment. This notice must include the lease fee that your cable operator will charge for the equipment.
- When encryption becomes common, cable subscribers will not have to schedule as many service appointments and should be able to subscribe to and cancel cable service more easily.

What if I subscribe to cable service after an all digital cable operator has commenced encrypting their service?

- You are not entitled to the free equipment discussed above and your cable operator is permitted to charge you its standard equipment fees for any set-top boxes or CableCARDS necessary to activate the level of service you request. You may ask your cable operator for a rate card, which will specify the cost of this necessary equipment.

What does this mean for over-the-air television viewers and Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) subscribers?

- If you view television over-the-air through the use of an antenna, cable system encryption will not impact you in any way.
- If you subscribe to a DBS service, such as DIRECTV or Dish Network, cable system encryption will not impact you in any way.

Consumer Help Center

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

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