

FCC Open Commission Meeting
En Banc on Digital Television Transition

Panel 3: Reception Issues and Analog Nightlight Service
Opening Remarks

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Commissioners. I thank you for the opportunity to participate on this panel.

The transition to digital television is one of the most complex engineering and technical challenges that this agency has ever faced. It required packing twice as many stations into spectrum that was already heavily occupied in many areas, all while minimizing interference. At the same time we needed to prepare to later repack those stations for post-transition digital operation in order to make new spectrum available for public safety interoperable communications and for cutting-edge wireless broadband technologies.

None of this would have been possible without the cooperation and truly exceptional efforts of broadcasters, multi-channel video service providers, the consumer electronics industry and - most importantly - consumers all working together. We will need to continue to work together if we are to ensure a successful transition.

Overall, the transition to digital television will ultimately be a win-win for consumers and broadcasters because nearly 90 % of all stations will experience a net gain in the viewers that can receive their service. In an ideal world, every consumer would receive the exact same stations for digital service that they currently receive for analog service. Unfortunately, the laws of physics and other factors come into play so that this is not always possible.

This slide shows reception where the analog service area, represented by the dotted line, closely matches the digital service area, represented by the solid line. However, because the station moved from a VHF channel to a UHF channel, some spots, such as those that are behind hills, may have reception difficulties as represented by the red symbols.

This next slide shows a case where a station's digital service area is somewhat smaller than its analog service area, which could be due to any of a number of factors including the need to prevent interference to other stations. Note that in this case, as in many others, the yellow, rather than red, symbol indicates that the same network is available to those viewers from another station.

This last slide shows a case where a station has chosen to relocate its broadcast antenna tower. Many new viewers will be able to receive the digital signal than the analog signal, however, there are some viewers who will now be outside the digital service area for that station.

The Commission has prepared and published maps comparing the analog and digital service areas for all TV stations. We are continuing to analyze the maps, together with other data, to identify the hot spots that are most at risk for experiencing significant changes in coverage and other factors that may impact consumers. We will share this information with our call centers and outreach groups to help consumers work through any reception issues caused by these changes. The Commission has also taken action to enable broadcasters to improve their coverage, such as by providing for distributed transmission systems and repeaters, and we will work with broadcasters to minimize reception losses wherever possible.

Many consumers are concerned about whether they will need a new antenna. It is very difficult to predict whether a particular consumer may need a new antenna because there are so many factors that affect reception and antenna performance. We have been advising consumers that they should connect their converter boxes as soon as possible to check their present DTV reception. Most people will find that their existing antenna works just fine, but some will find that they may need a better antenna, particularly if they did not have an antenna that provides good reception on UHF channels. We are working on ways we can improve the information available to consumers to help them identify and resolve antenna issues.

Engineers in the Media Bureau, in coordination with OET, have developed an excellent web page to help consumers determine what signals they should be able to receive. Consumers will be able to type in their address or a zip code and get a list of the stations that are expected to be available at that

location. We plan to make this tool available on the FCC DTV web site within a few days.

The Commission recently implemented an “analog nightlight” service in anticipation of the planned February 17, 2009 DTV transition deadline in compliance with the DTV Nightlight Act. The public notice the Commission released today encourages stations that terminate their analog signal on February 17, 2009 to continue to broadcast on their analog signal information regarding their transition and, if necessary, emergency information. Such service was provided for the early transitions in Wilmington North Carolina and Hawaii and was a great help to consumers. The Commission is asking stations that intend to provide such service to so indicate in their early termination notification to the Commission.

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, much has been done, but we have much left to do to make this transition go as smoothly as possible. It is my privilege to work together, under your leadership, with the outstanding and dedicated team of people here at the FCC and all of our partners in this effort. Working together, I know we will get this right.