

# Digital TV Transition Will Be Messy

October 16 2008, by John Messina

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The pending mandatory switch of all U.S. televisions to digital will be messy, a federal communications official said on Tuesday, urging broadcasters to step up local efforts to educate the public.

On February 17, 2009 over-the-air broadcast television as we know will no longer exist. This is due to Congress ordering the switch to digital to free up public airwaves for other uses, such as for police and fire departments.

About 15 percent of U.S. households are still using analog TV sets and will risk their screens going black as analog signals are turned off. Owners of analog televisions must buy a TV converter box to receive a digital signal. The digital transition will not impact TV sets that are

connected to cable and satellite service.

Local Broadcasters need to educate their viewers as to what they need to do so that they don't lose the signal on February 17 of next year. Most households will most likely need to purchase new antennas because their existing ones will not pull in the digital signal.

Regulators are offering consumers \$40 coupons (two per household) to help pay for converter boxes, but there is no plan in place to manage the last minute demand from consumers for the coupons.

FCC member Robert McDowell has just returned from a tour in Alaska, Montana & Oklahoma, and he's seen things, terrible things. Things that have convinced him that the transition on February 17, 2009 "will be messy ... but we will get through it" when over the air broadcasts go all-digital.

The GAO report said regulators are unprepared for an expected surge in demand for government help from consumers needing to switch over to digital.

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