

# TV companies have a year to pipe down loud ads

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In this April 20, 2010 file photo, Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., testifies before the House Financial Services Committee regarding Lehman Brothers and financial reform on Capitol Hill in Washington. While watching a sporting event with family members, Eshoo was jarred by a “horribly loud” commercial. Her brother-in-law suggested she do something about it. She did \_ with what started as a simple, one-page legislative proposal. The measure became one of the most popular bills she's ever sponsored. “What I never dreamed of was what kind of chord it would strike with people,” Eshoo says. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak, File)

(AP) -- Shush, already. That's the message the Federal Communications Commission is sending with new rules that force broadcast, cable and satellite companies to turn down the volume on blaring TV commercials.

On Tuesday, the FCC passed a set of regulations that will prevent commercials from being louder than the shows around them. It's all part

of the Commercial Advertisement Loudness Mitigation (or CALM) Act, which President Obama signed into law last December. The rules go into effect a year from now. Companies that don't comply will face unspecified FCC action.

Thunderous [television ads](#) have annoyed viewers for years. The FCC says people have grumbled about the issue for at least a half century. But since 2002 - thanks in part to all those clangorous car commercials, earsplitting electronics [ads](#) and booming beer pitches - loud advertisements have been one of the top complaints the FCC receives.

Complaints grew in recent years, as ads became even louder. In the days of [analog TV](#), louder ads took up more space on the airwaves. So broadcasters toned them down to avoid interfering with other channels. Since the conversion to digital TV broadcasts two years ago, loud ads no longer take up more airwave space than quiet ones. The change transformed the commercial break into a noisy arms race.

"Nobody wanted to be the quiet guy in the set of commercials," says David Unsworth, [senior vice president](#) of satellite and technical operations at DG, a company that distributes ads to broadcasters.

In a recent analysis, DG found that some ads were 10 times as loud as the programs they interrupted.

"Everybody's been trying to push the envelope using (digital) compression to make their spots as loud as they can," Unsworth says.

A few years ago, an annoying ad got to the ears of Rep. Anna Eshoo, the Democratic congresswoman whose district in California's [Silicon Valley](#) is home to [Facebook](#) and Hewlett-Packard Co. While watching a sporting event with family members, Eshoo was jarred by a "horribly loud" commercial. Her brother-in-law suggested she do something about

it. She did - with what started as a simple, one-page legislative proposal.

The measure became one of the most popular bills she's ever sponsored.

"What I never dreamed of was what kind of chord it would strike with people," Eshoo says.

The FCC rules require TV distributors to set up equipment to monitor the average sound level of ads as they come in. If they're too loud, distributors must adjust the sound levels before they can be aired. It recommends practices set out in 2009 by the Advanced Television Systems Committee, a standards-setting body.

If compliance with the rules places a financial burden on a company, the FCC will give it extra time - up to December 2014 - to comply.

Those concessions have helped to reduce opposition.

"We think that the FCC struck the right balance," says National Association of Broadcasters spokesman Dennis Wharton.

In the months leading up to the FCC's release of the new rules, advertisers were already turning down the noise because many broadcasters are now rejecting loud ads. Since DG began monitoring sound levels this summer, the number of ads that were too loud has fallen from about 70 percent of all ads to roughly 30 percent, Unsworth says.

Already, hundreds of TV stations, cable and satellite companies have updated equipment to comply, says Tim Carroll, founder and president of Linear Acoustic Inc., a leading maker of the equipment.

For its part, ABC says it has installed equipment at its eight television

stations. CBS has been operating under the guidelines for some time. NBC has sent specifications to its commercial suppliers and has installed equipment to reduce the volume of loud ads. Fox declined to comment, although Unsworth says the network has been rejecting ads that are too loud and getting advertisers to fix them.

Leading cable TV companies Comcast Corp. and Time Warner Cable Inc. declined to comment.

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