



TRI-VALLEY Help-line

January 2009

Tri-Valley receives many questions from area seniors, younger people with disabilities and caregivers and has created this monthly Help-line column to provide some assistance. We are also available five days a week to answer individual questions.

Last Call: Turn Your TV into DTV!

Q: When do I have to turn my TV into a digital TV?

A: Beginning February 17, 2009, if your TV set relies on an antenna, or "rabbit ears," to receive channels clearly---you are going to need a digital-to-analog "converter box". This box will allow your TV to receive and display digital signals. More than one-third of U.S. households have at least one analog TV that will need a converter box. To learn how to convert your analog TV to digital, go to the website www.dtv2009.gov. If your TV is connected to a cable or satellite service of any kind, don't worry about conversion. You should be all set.

This change to digital was brought about by a federally-required shutdown of full-power television analog signals and conversion to DTV (digital television). As of midnight, February 17, 2009, all full-power television stations have to stop broadcasting in analog format, and broadcast only in digital. All-digital broadcasting means a better picture and sound quality, and will free up frequencies for more wireless services for consumers. In early December, many Boston TV and cable stations held a 'DTV Test Day' to let viewers know whether or not they were ready for DTV Transition. These stations created a message on the 'crawl' strip across your TV. A screen message in red meant your TV was not DTV ready, and a green message meant you were all set.

If you have not yet taken any action to convert your TV into DTV, here are your

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options before February 17th:

- You can buy a new TV set with a built in digital tuner. But this is the most expensive alternative
- You can buy a converter box for the top of your TV that will convert the digital signal into an analog signal.
- You can sign a contract with a cable company, satellite company, or a phone company, for TV service, in which case your analog TV will continue to do the job.

The cheapest solution is option number two: buy a DTV converter box. The federal government has made that option affordable, by offering your household two coupons to buy a converter box. The coupons are worth \$40 towards the cost of your purchase. You then take the coupons to any retail store that sells the boxes, and buy it there. Most electronics stores carry these boxes. But act now to order your coupons. You have to ask for coupons no later than March 31, 2009. TV converter boxes should cost between \$50 and \$70. After using your two coupons, you will be charged by converter box sellers the remaining balance of between \$10 and \$30. Converter boxes must meet the standards set by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in order to qualify for the Coupon Program. There are currently 18 models of converters, so be sure to ask if it meets NTIA standards. When you call for a DTV coupon, call from your home phone.

Once you order your coupons, they should arrive in about ten business days in the mail. Call toll-free 1-866-961-2492 to order a box. For the Spanish-speaking toll free line, call 1-888-225-5322. Each TV that is not DTV ready, will need its own box, so if you have two TVs, you will use both coupons.

The DTV switch will enhance the visual quality of your reception—but unfortunately, DTV will not make the content of the shows on TV any better. That’s something digital signals can’t improve. If you are unable to make the change to your TV without help, give this article to a family member, or friend, and have them either call for the coupons, or go to the website. Do not be pressured into buying a new TV just to get digital capacity. This is not necessary, and for someone living on a limited budget, is not a good use of funds. When you call the toll-free number, you may have to wait on line for someone to pick up. That just shows that many people still have not taken action to get their coupons. Make that call today!

Tri-Valley continues to be ready to assist you with other questions through its free

information & referral HELP-LINE at (508) 949-6640 or 1-800-286-6640. You may also access Tri-Valley by E-mail: info@tves.org or visit the agency's website at:

www.trivalleyinc.org

Tri-Valley, Inc. is a private non-profit agency providing in-home and community based services in 25 Southern Worcester County towns. The agency receives funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Federal financial support under the Older Americans Act furnished by the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Funds are also received from other public and private sources. All donations are welcome and memorials may be established. Marilyn L. Travinski is the executive director.

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