

CABLE DIGITAL TRANSITION FAQs

Are cable companies in New York changing the way they deliver service?

Yes. Cable companies are considering switching from analog to digital technology to increase the number and picture quality of services or channels that can be delivered.

Why is the cable company changing the way it delivers its service?

Switching from analog to digital technology increases the number and picture quality of channels and services that can be delivered. With rapidly growing demand for high-definition television (HDTV) channels, which utilize three times the amount of spectrum space of standard channels, every effort is being made to implement advanced technologies. Therefore, cable companies are expanding the use of fiber over cable and digital over analog.

But if I only want a limited number of channels and am not interested in high-definition television, how and why does this affect me?

As new technology emerges, older technologies are abandoned. Maintaining older technologies for an ever shrinking number of customers who still want them is costly and inefficient. For one thing, manufacturers who provided the older hardware for it eventually stop maintaining and replacing it. (To illustrate, another example would be the elimination of rotary dial telephones in favor of today's wireless handsets and cell phones.) Continuing these analog-delivered services has become a losing proposition economically that prevents service providers from fully expanding digital- and high-definition channels that are much more in demand.

Is this move to digital and the need for converters true of all cable and satellite companies?

It either is or will be very soon. Verizon is already an all digital service. Cablevision has plans to become one by the end of this calendar year. Other service providers will likely be following suit. In the interim until this changeover is completed, a decreasing number of channels will be available in analog format viewable without a converter on older television sets, while an increasing number of channels will become available only with a new digital television set and/or converter. Satellite services (DirecTV and Dish TV) are also all digital; but in their case converters are required even if you already have the most modern television digital television set available.

My company is now requiring a converter to view some channels even though I have a new flat screen digital television with a QAM tuner. Is it legal for the company to do that?

Under federal law, governments are not allowed to restrict cable companies from using whatever technology they choose; or to regulate their marketing plans. Some channels you used to receive without a converter — and even some you used to be able to receive with a QAM tuner — have been or will be encrypted at the option of the service provider, thereby requiring rental of a converter in order to watch them. Phrases such as “cable-ready TV” or “cable compliant” which imply full functionality with cable services are only marketing terms used by set manufacturers

that do not pertain to all situations. There have been and will continue to be technical incompatibilities between cable systems and television sets that can only be solved through the rental and use of converters and descramblers. Nonetheless, in all cases, cable companies are required to provide you 30 days advance written notice of all rate and service changes.

I'm confused. How is this different from the digital transition I kept hearing about constantly on my local stations?

It can be confusing. For those who don't subscribe to cable or satellite, there is a federally mandated transition from analog to digital over-the-air broadcast television which took place on June 12, 2009 for most stations. If you are already a cable or satellite subscriber that change (or transition) has not affected you and you need not do anything. However, any portable, handheld or other televisions that used an antenna for reception no longer display a picture or sound without an analog-to-digital converter especially designed for reception of broadcast television. To reiterate, if you receive your television service from a cable or satellite provider, the converters being sold for the digital transition of broadcast television with the FCC-provided discount coupon will not work with cable and satellite television.

If I still have questions, who can I contact?

You can call your service provider; or call us at 1-800-342-3377 or e-mail us at askpsc@dps.state.ny.us