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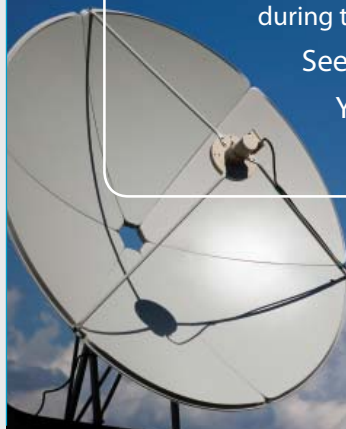
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DTV Delay Offers Relief, Raises New Questions

The deadline for television broadcasters to transition to digital signals (i.e. DTV) has been moved forward by close to four months, from the original Feb. 17 date to June 12, 2009. As a result, full-power television stations have extra time before they must begin broadcasting exclusively in a digital format.

However, while the transition delay does benefit those households completely unprepared for digital TV (estimated by Nielsen as 6.5 million U.S. households), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) now is faced with consumers still confused by the implications of the DTV transition and broadcasters that are looking to move ahead with the switch now.

Broadcasters will still be allowed to turn off their analog signals before June 12. Those that are still on track to make the switch before the new date, however, will have to inform their viewers in advance and ask the FCC for permission to do so. As of the middle of February, approximately 700 broadcasters had sent requests to the FCC asking to make the transition earlier than June.

FCC Commissioner Robert McDowell emphasized that the commission may not allow a station to transition early if there are other stations in the same market that are keeping their analog signals on the air.

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Sentiment to Revive Fairness Doctrine Spurs Furious Debate

Broadcasters and Washington policymakers were abuzz throughout February about indications and rumors that the currently defunct Fairness Doctrine is about to be resurrected.

The Fairness Doctrine – instituted in 1949, upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1969 and then scrapped by the FCC in 1987 – requires broadcasters that air political content to provide opposing viewpoints as well. Radio and television broadcasters, particularly those that specialize in more politically conservative content, have come out swinging against reviving the standard. And now all eyes are looking to President Obama, and to a lesser extent Congress, to see what, if any, action will be taken.

White House spokesman Ben LaBolt told Fox News that Obama “does not believe the Fairness Doctrine should be reinstated.” Further, White House senior advisor David Axelrod and press secretary Robert Gibbs have declined to make statements of support for the rule.

However, a number of Democratic members of the U.S. House and Senate are pushing for its revival. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) and Sens. Debbie Stabenow (Mich.), Tom Harkin (Iowa) and Charles Schumer (N.Y.) have gone on the record supporting the return of the Fairness Doctrine. Former President Bill Clinton has also said he hopes it will return.

Radio broadcasters for the most part are pushing to keep the Fairness Doctrine dead. The most common argument is that it should remain the responsibility of the stations themselves to present balanced content or coverage, if that’s what the station wants or chooses. Longtime New Jersey radio morning host Jack Ellery lamented to NTS Media Online that the return of the doctrine would force him to make unwanted changes to his show.

The House Republican Conference meanwhile has created a four-man Fairness Doctrine Rapid Response Team to oppose revival of the rule, and the conservatively focused Thomas More Law Center has begun to draft a federal lawsuit, which it plans to file if the Fairness Doctrine returns.

DTV Delay continued from page 1

Are you a broadcaster looking for ways to reduce your transmission space, add more channels and reduce distribution costs? Are you trying to distribute your existing DTV signal to outlying transmitter sites? In these and many other cases, digital video technology can help you expand your broadcasting possibilities affordably and efficiently.

NPR Satellite Services is meeting the needs of numerous stations and networks. If you have questions about digital video or other satellite-distribution topics, call us at 202.513.2626, or email linkup@npr.org.



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HDTV Households Double in Last Two Years

More than one-third of all U.S. households have at least one HDTV set, which is approximately double the amount that had such sets two years ago, according to new consumer research from Leichtman Research Group (LRG). This growth is the result of continued consumer purchases of high-definition television sets as well as the decreasing supply of non-HDTV sets.

The study found that 22 percent of all households purchased a new television set in the last year, with close to half (43 percent) of them spending over \$1,000.

"About 40 million U.S. households now have at least one HDTV set, and

LRG forecasts that this number will double over the next four years," said Bruce Leichtman, LRG president and principal analyst.

The study also found that 33 percent of HDTV owners have more than one high-definition set, and 25 percent are planning to buy another HDTV in the next 12 months. However, LRG said about 18 percent of HDTV owners think they are watching HD programming, but in fact are still watching analog programming.

The findings, published in HDTV 2008: Consumer Awareness, Interest and Ownership, came from a survey of 1,302 households throughout the United States.

A House resolution (HR49) opposing "any new performance fee, tax, royalty or other charge" on local radio stations was introduced Feb. 12 with 110 signatures from both parties. The "Local Radio Freedom Act", introduced by Texas Reps Gene Green (D) and Mike Conaway (R), would block the recording industry's attempt to force terrestrial radio to pay performers for broadcasting their recordings. The bill is a virtual duplicate of one that was introduced last session. But this year's version carries twice as many members' signatures.

Space Debris Debate Heats Up Following Feb. 10 Collision

The Feb. 10 collision between an Iridium commercial satellite and a dilapidated Russian spacecraft has spurred discussions on how best to combat the problem of space debris.

That same month in Vienna, members of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space pondered several options: trying to remove the approximately 18,000 pieces of debris in the low and high orbit around the Earth or developing systems that will prevent more crashes.

Nicholas Johnson, NASA's chief scientist for orbital debris, said the problem will only get worse as time goes on, if the debris isn't either removed or pushed further out into space. Richard Crowther, representing the United Kingdom, argued this plan would be too expensive and could end up causing more collisions, which would just add further to the volume of garbage orbiting the Earth.

Instead, Crowther said better communications between countries and business enterprises about the location of objects in orbit would minimize collisions.

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