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THE TRANSITION TO DIGITAL TV

On February 17, 2009, our nation will complete its move to a new form of broadcast television called digital TV or DTV. The move to DTV raises a lot of questions, especially in rural areas like Saline County where we get Channels 8 and 10/11 over the air for free. Will your current televisions you own work next year? If you get free TV signals over the air on an antennae and your TV doesn't have a built-in digital tuner, it will stop receiving television signals.

If you receive television through a pay service, like cable or satellite, you should check with your service provider. It is unlikely you will be affected by the transition. But if you receive free television over the air with an antenna on a TV that has a built-in digital tuner, you should already be able to receive DTV signals and will not be affected by the transition.

If you receive television over the air with an antenna on a TV that does not have a built-in digital tuner, you have three options to continue receiving TV after February 17, 2009:

- 1) Connect your TV to a converter box that enables it to receive DTV signals. A box costs \$40.00 - \$70.00. The government is offering \$40.00 coupons to reduce the cost of the boxes. To apply for a coupon, call 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009) or visit www.dtv2009.gov. You will need one converter box for each old TV set.
- 2) Connect your TV to cable, satellite or another pay service; or
- 3) Replace your TV with a new TV that has a built-in digital tuner.

Why is the transition to DTV happening? DTV is a more flexible and efficient broadcast technology than the current technology. DTV provides better picture and sound quality and it frees up space in the air for more channels and for use by public safety officials for emergency-response communications. We are truly in the digital age.

So do you have a digital tuner in your existing television sets when using an antennae? Consult your owners manual. If that's not possible, you may be able to look up information about your TV set on the manufacturer's website. Or, you can take an up-close look at your TV set. In any case, you're trying to find out if your set has an input connection labeled "digital input" or "ATSC" (it's the acronym for the new digital TV format).

If you bought your TV set before 1998, it probably doesn't have a digital tuner at all. Almost every TV set made before 1998 was a traditional "analog" set that can't display digital TV signals without either a special converter or a cable TV connection. If you bought a big-screen, projection TV between 1998 and 2004, it's possible there's a built-in digital tuner inside. But chances aren't great. Only a limited percentage of projection TV sets (and generally only those 42 inches in diameter or larger) included digital tuners before 2004. If you've purchased a new TV set since 2004, your chances of having a built-in digital tuner improves dramatically. Starting in 2004,



many of the TV sets sold at popular electronics stores have featured digital tuners that will let you receive the new digital over-the-air broadcasts. But it's not a sure thing.

Even some of the newer TV sets are purely display monitors that lack the internal circuitry needed to pick up digital broadcasts. Usually these sets have been advertised as "HD-ready" or "HDTV monitor" sets. That means they can display digital and high-definition signals, but they need help getting those signals in the first place. That means you still need a special converter or a cable TV connection.

For more information, a good website on the changes is at: www.ncta.com.

Randy Pryor, Extension Educator
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Saline County
306 West 3rd Street, Wilber, NE 68465

Phone (402) 821-2151 . Fax (402) 821-3398 . e-mail: randy.pryor@unl.edu