

TOP STORIES

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Digital Television Deadline Looms



WSIL TV--In about seven weeks, the way you view television will change. Analog signals will be a thing of the past--as the government is requiring a switch to digital.

Some folks were hoping to get some help paying for the required equipment, are finding they may be out of time.

In 2005, Congress passed legislation for the switch over. They also passed the deficit reduction act to help defray the cost of buying a converter box for the change.

"Which allocated \$1.5 billion to the program, \$1.34 billion to be used for coupons. Each household is eligible for two \$40 coupons."

Bart Forbes is a spokesman for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

He says viewers who go online to apply for a coupon, may be getting a message telling users they'll have to wait for more funds to be available. But Forbes says the program is not out of money.

"As coupons expire from those we've sent out, the funds are deobligated from our total fund ceiling of \$1.3 billion and the new coupon request will get the reobligated funds and we'll mail them out when the funds come in from the expired coupons."

Forbes says since January 2008, the NTIA has sent out 44.8 million of the \$40 coupons to the 24 million households that have requested them. Eighteen million of those have been redeemed.

"If folks are just now getting around to it, they may have to purchase a converter box at full price, subscribe to cable or buy a digital TV if they want to get a digital signal on the analog set."

The converter boxes are available at most stores and range in price from \$40 to \$80.

Congress could raise the cap and waive the accounting rules that require the NTIA to wait for unredeemed coupons to expire before issuing new ones. Or lawmakers could approve more money for the program.

by Kevin Hunsperger
khunsperger@wsiltv.com