

Are Local Retailers Ready For DTV Conversion?

Kristen Castillo
I-Team Producer

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SAN DIEGO -- The digital TV conversion happens February 17, 2009, changing TV signals from analog to digital. If you're one of the 19 million American consumers who get their TV reception using rabbit ear antennas, you need to get informed about the change.

The 10News I-Team went undercover to see how informed local retailers were about the conversion.

"We want consumers to know they can continue to use their analog TVs," explained Kathie Klass, ombudsman for the U.S. Department of Commerce's DTV Converter Box Coupon Program.

The digital converter box allows analog TV set owners to receive a digital television signal. Without a converter box, analog users will need to pay for satellite or cable to get TV reception after the digital conversion next winter. The converter boxes cost about \$60, but a government coupon helps consumers save money -- \$40 off each converter box.

"Many retailers are doing a good job of informing consumers and answering their questions," said Klass.

But not all retailers, as the I-Team found out after undercover testing seven electronics stores across the county including Circuit City, Target, Best Buy, Walmart and Fry's.

A 10News producer and photographer shopped the retailers and asked questions like, "What will the converter box do?" "Do we need to buy a new TV?"

At the Target in Encinitas, the producer is told she might need a new TV if her TV is old. That's not true! She only needs a converter box.

When asked if the converter box would work with our TV, the same clerk responded, "I can't read the future. I don't know about that."

At the Encinitas Best Buy, our producer is told she can buy the converter box now and get a rebate later.

That's wrong! The government discount is a coupon to be used at the time of purchase, not as a rebate after purchase.

"A couple of the stores were more informed than others," said producer Kristen Castillo. "But it does seem that many of the employees aren't all in the loop."

The I-Team received the best DTV information from the Target and Walmart on Broadway in Chula Vista, as well as the Best Buy in Mission Valley and the Fry's in Mission Gorge.

Digital Conversion Details:

- The conversion takes effect February 17, 2009
- Get more information and coupons by going online at www.Dtv2009.gov or call 888-388-2009
- Each household is eligible for two \$40 coupons for digital converter boxes
- The coupons are valid for 90 days and can't be reissued
- Coupons take four to six weeks to arrive by mail
- So far, the government has handed out over 18 million coupons

Check out the 10News DTV section: www.10news.com/digital-tv/index.html

Retailer statements regarding DTV Test:

Phil Keene of Walmart tells the I-Team: "We did extensive training with staff. I'm happy to hear the outcome of your test."

Joshua Thomas of Target: "We understand the transition is complicated and complex for team members and guests ... we've done team member training."

Thomas said the idea behind the training is to ensure guests have the resources they need to make decisions about the conversion. He says signage in the stores, as well as brochures and in-store TV promotions provide guests with DTV information.