



## SUMMIT ON VOLUNTEERISM A Response to Economic Crisis

### **Emil Cherian, Federal Communications Commission**

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for the introduction. I'm here today to talk to you about the Commission's upcoming efforts for the digital television transition. I'm an agent with the local New York office and I'm also the New York DMA Coordinator, which is responsible for New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

But today I'm here to talk to you on behalf of the Commission as a whole. As many of you have heard and you are aware of, the transition date has been postponed from February 17th to June 12th. What this means is that stations throughout the country are still transitioning earlier than June 12th. June 12th is the final date. But there is no mandate that stations have to stay on until June 12th.

So February 17th some stations have already transitioned early and other parts of the country they will still transition between March and June. So the country as a whole will be going through a rolling transition. Different parts of the country will transition at different times.

The FCC will continue its DTV outreach efforts and is even stepping up their efforts. We're taking this extension as a way to reach more people and try to make sure that as much as possible that we don't leave anyone behind who doesn't have television service.

So probably all of you are aware of it. The basic concept is analog TV, those who are receiving free over-the-air TV through rabbit ears, rooftop antennas, through older televisions will no longer be able to pick up any TV signal after the transition date. Those who have cable, those who have satellite, any kind of paid service will not be affected.

But throughout this country there's millions of people that still rely on free over-the-air TV. So we're trying to educate the public. We're trying to let people know. And in this tremendous effort on the part of the FCC, as was mentioned before, cannot be done alone. We're looking for volunteers to help us to reach the targeted areas that will be most affected: The elderly, low income, non-English speaking groups that may not otherwise come across this information. So especially in these severe economic times, the FCC is not advocating it but some people have said they cannot pay their cable bills, they cannot pay satellite. They're choosing on their own to get free over-the-air TV. And we want to encourage as many people as possible for that option and help them in those efforts.

Millions of people will be affected. So the focus right now from the FCC is to set up what we're calling walk in centers, walk in DTV assistance centers, places where people can actually walk in and see how a converter box is hooked up, get questions answered on the DTV transition, and get material also.

We will train any volunteers that would like to help. We will provide material. We will help out in any way we can. But the FCC does not have enough staff to reach all throughout the country. We need all these organizations here to help us reach people.

Our plan involves a basically simple set up that will not disrupt normal business; maybe in senior centers, libraries, churches, a volunteer with a small table with a TV and a converter box, could show people and explain the process. For many of us what may be a simple installation may be a lot harder for a lot of people, especially those elderly that they may find a little trouble following the lengthy instructions they may come across with these converter boxes.



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So we would like to reach these people and we would like to show them that it's not anything that they have to fear, not anything too complicated but something that is reachable for everyone to do and something we encourage people to do before June 12<sup>th</sup>. Because different parts of the country will transition at different times and we don't want people waiting until the last minute. Otherwise it'll be February 17th all over again and those who wait until the last minute will be affected and left in the dark.

And many of you are aware that most people not only rely on TV for entertainment purposes but for news, for emergency notification. So it's a very important fact that we reach as many people as possible and make sure that they're prepared for this.

And the next other effort is especially those elderly who cannot hook up the converter boxes themselves will need people to come in and help them do it. So we're looking for people to volunteer, to help do in-home installations, help the local communities and volunteer and help people, just go in and hook up the box. It might take me five or ten minutes to do it but it'll be a much needed service that will help so many people that will be affected.

So I also brought information for anyone who needs it. Basically there are three options that are available. People can choose if they want to get a new TV which has the digital tuner built into it. People can get cable. They can satellite. Or they can get the converter box.

And I'm sure a lot of you have heard about the coupon program. As of January, the agency that was offering the coupons, NTA, ran out of funding. They reached their \$1.3 billion ceiling. But President Obama has allocated more funding for it. The NTA is working on a contract. They're going through the list. We're encouraging people to still apply for the coupons. Apply for the coupons. Get the converter box. Hook it up as soon as possible. Make sure that they're ready for it.

In addition to the converter boxes, we're making sure that people are aware of their antennas. Make sure they get good reception. If they don't presently get good reception they may have to upgrade their antennas as well. The television stations which presently are transmitting on the VHF band which is primarily the two dipoles that people see on the antennas, are insufficient. You need the UHF part as well for the digital signal which is the circular antenna piece. So we are encouraging people to keep that in mind. It's not only the converter boxes but the antennas as well. And this way, people will be better prepared for the June digital transition; hopefully as much as possible we won't leave anyone behind.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk to everyone today. Thank you very much.