

MAB DTV Transition Plan

Executive Summary

As mandated by Congress and directed by the Federal Communications Commission, analog television broadcasting will cease on February 17, 2009, posing a significant challenge for broadcasters and the viewing public.

In the United States about 20 million households rely on free, over-the-air television signals from local broadcasters. In Michigan, as many as 600,000 households, or about 1.5 million citizens, rely on over-the-air signals and do not have cable or satellite television service.

To maintain their access to news, entertainment and emergency information, these citizens will have to take one of the following steps:

- Acquire and install a digital-to-analog converter that will allow their existing analog televisions to receive and display digital broadcast signals.
- Acquire a new television with a built-in digital tuner.
- Subscribe to cable or satellite television service, where available.

The 600,000 Michigan households who must make this transition are disproportionately poor, elderly and rural, and many will need assistance that goes beyond the level planned by the federal government.

To meet this challenge at the state and local level, the Michigan Association of Broadcasters is engaged in an aggressive campaign to create awareness of the digital television transition and to assist “at-risk” viewers at the individual level.

Partner Organizations and Agencies

The MAB, in addition to its own membership, has recruited a number of key partners who will assist with building awareness among viewers and assisting those who need additional help. Partners include:

- Michigan Community Action Agency Association
- Michigan State University Extension
- Michigan Association of Counties
- Michigan Department of Human Services
- Michigan Department of Community Health
- Michigan Office of Services to the Aging
- Michigan Office of the Attorney General
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

- Michigan AARP
- Michigan Library Association

Plan Element 1: Awareness

Broadcasters in Michigan are already making listeners and viewers aware of the transition through radio and television messages that will run through early 2009. These messages run on a regular basis via airtime inventory that is provided to the MAB by its member stations. In addition, Michigan's television stations are producing and running their messages, geared specifically to their audiences and markets.

The MAB is working closely with the National Association of Broadcasters to support its public education plan at the state level. Activities include media briefings, a speakers bureau, linking web traffic to www.dtvanswers.com, organization of state coalition meetings, support of the DTV Road Show, and reporting activities to the NAB so it can aggregate national totals for reports to Congress and the FCC.

In February, the NAB will launch a series of radio and television messages that will feature Michigan broadcasting legend Ernie Harwell, the longtime voice of the Detroit Tigers.

The MAB also maintains a DTV transition website that features specific information and links to other sources, including the FCC, National Association of Broadcasters, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and several consumer sites for additional resources.

Our communication partners were chosen for their wide reach across the state of Michigan, and for their credibility with their constituents. For example, MSU Extension has offices in all 83 Michigan counties; the Michigan Association of Counties also has members in each county. Almost every community has a library, and the Michigan Community Action Agency Association has offices that have served Michigan citizens since the 1960s.

Our communication partners are using their established connections to provide information to their individual constituents through their regular communications vehicles and through personal contact as they deliver other services and assistance.

Element 2: Dispatch

Most of our communications efforts will direct citizens to visit the MAB website, call the NTIA toll-free telephone number, or call their local Michigan Community Action Agency office. The MAB website has information and links to several other sources including the Federal Communications Commission and the National Association of Broadcasters. The NTIA toll-free number will allow callers to order converter coupons, and MCAAA offices will have information about the transition and, if possible, will offer technical assistance to citizens.

We estimate that of the 600,000 over-the-air households, the majority will need information about their options, but no further assistance. Those who do need further assistance will be referred to MCAAA.

Element 3: Fulfillment

Michigan citizens who need assistance will be referred to their local MCAAA office, which will, if possible, help them to acquire and install a digital-to-analog converter for their existing television. These citizens might be elderly or have physical limitations. They might have limited financial resources and are unable to afford even the small cost of acquiring a converter. We are working on funding and inventory issues that would allow MCAAA to provide in-home services to those citizens.

We are still refining the details of our plan in this area, but we envision a process by which we will be able to provide, through our partners, financial and technical assistance to those viewers who have no other sources of help.

Element 4: Ancillary Issues

Consumer Fraud

We believe that a nationwide transition with multiple technical and financial aspects, especially for the poor, elderly and other at-risk populations, could serve as fertile ground for those who engage in consumer fraud. For example, we expect there will be attempts to sell faulty converters or charge exorbitant prices for the installation of converters or television antennas.

Because of this concern we are partnering with the Office of the Attorney General, which will help us make consumers aware of potential fraudulent activities and prosecute fraud if it occurs.

The AG's office will include DTV transition information in its own communications to citizens and be ready to investigate any reports of suspicious activity.

Recycling and Waste Disposal

It is difficult to refine estimates down to precise numbers, but we assume that the digital transition will result in an increase in the number of old analog televisions that find their way to recycling centers and landfills. CRT televisions have significant amounts of lead and smaller amounts of other metals, including mercury, that are undesirable in a landfill and must be handled correctly in a recycling facility.

In our discussions with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, we have established two goals:

- Reducing, as much as possible, the number of television sets that are directed to the waste stream, and
- Making sure that any televisions that reach the waste stream are directed to appropriate recycling facilities.

Through our information and awareness campaign we will urge consumers to “recycle” their old televisions by acquiring digital-to-analog converters or designating the television sets for other uses, such as video games or DVD playback.

In addition, we will provide information to callers and website visitors on recycling centers in their municipalities, counties or geographic areas of the state.

Conclusion

Michigan’s Broadcasters are serious about their commitment to their communities and the individual citizens they serve. This DTV Transition Plan represents their concern and their support for every citizen of the state.

It also reflects the cooperative and service-oriented nature of our partners, who make the entire plan possible. Without their commitment, our efforts would be far less effective in assuring a smooth transition for television viewers.