

Consumer FAQs: TV Spectrum Auction

The Federal Communications Commission recently held a spectrum auction to help improve and expand wireless services across the country to meet the ever-increasing needs of American consumers for faster, higher capacity mobile broadband services. In the auction, TV broadcasters could voluntarily give up their current broadcast channel in exchange for a share of the proceeds from an auction of their channel to commercial wireless service providers to provide expanded mobile broadband services.

What does this mean for you? Now that the auction is complete, some broadcast television stations will change their channels, or share a channel with another station, or, in some cases, go off the air. Importantly, unless a station in your area is going off the air altogether, this will only affect you if you obtain TV service over the air using an antenna; if you subscribe to a cable TV or satellite provider, they will make any necessary changes for you.

If you have over-the-air TV, there are a few steps you will need to take at the appropriate time. The FCC has worked with broadcasters to plan a post-auction transition that minimizes viewer inconvenience and confusion. Below you'll find answers to commonly-asked questions and links to helpful Commission resources.

For more information about the broadcast TV incentive auction, visit our webpage at www.fcc.gov/incentiveauctions.

When will I find out if or when stations in my area are moving channels or ceasing broadcasts?

The FCC announced the results of the auction on April 13, 2017. A list of auction winners, what they bid to do, and how much they won as well as a list of new TV channel assignments for all TV stations is available in the Closing and Channel Reassignment Public Notice: https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-17-314A1.pdf.

Please note that channels remaining on the air have an opportunity to request alternative channels or expand their coverage area, so the information provided in public notice is subject to change.

Will I need to do anything to continue watching TV over the air?

In general, no. You will not need to buy a new TV or purchase a converter box like you may have done during the transition to digital television in 2009. When one or more of your local TV stations move to a new channel, the only action that you will need to take is to re-scan your television set. They will provide notice in advance of such a change, but if you notice a channel missing at any time, it may have moved to a new channel number so you may want to rescan for available TV stations in case you missed a notice. For more information on how to rescan for channels, visit our guide at www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/remember-rescan.

Will I need to buy a new antenna?

In very limited cases, a local station may move from a UHF channel to a VHF channel, which may affect those few viewers who have a UHF-only TV antenna. For more information about over-the-air TV antennas, visit our guide at: www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/antennas-and-digital-television.

Will cable and satellite still carry my local TV stations?

Broadcast TV stations will keep their current arrangements with cable and satellite TV systems to carry the stations' broadcasts after the auction process is complete.

A few broadcast TV stations may move their transmission facilities as part of this process, which may affect which TV markets they're carried in as "local" stations. If they shift to a neighboring TV market, it may affect which cable and satellite systems carry their station. Please check with your cable TV or satellite TV provider if at any time you cannot find one of your local TV stations on their systems.

When will channels make their moves?

Starting on April 13, 2017, there will be a 39-month transition period during which broadcast TV stations that received new channel assignments will undertake the technical work needed to begin broadcasting on their new frequencies. Channels that have chosen to relinquish their spectrum rights and go off the air will have 90 days from the date they receive their auction winnings to cease operating on their pre-auction channel. TV stations that instead elect to move their channels will do so during the course of the 39-months and will notify viewers when it is time to re-scan their TVs to find the new channels.

Will I be notified if a station is changing or going away?

Yes. Stations that are moving, changing signals or ceasing to broadcast must notify consumers with daily on-air announcements for at least 30 days prior to any change. During that time, stations will continue to operate on their current channels.

Will my local stations change even if they did not participate?

It's possible. As a result of the auction, there are fewer channels in the TV band, meaning that stations operating on channels that have been repurposed for wireless use would need to move to new channels. Other stations may need to move to different channels because of signal interference caused by changes in your TV market or in a nearby market. However, any station that changes its signal must notify viewers daily for at least 30 days before making the change.

Consumer Help Center

For more information on other consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

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