Digital TV Switch Not Needed in Kodiak

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Erik Wander/KMXT

The long-awaited nationwide switch to digital TV is Friday, when all analog television broadcasts from full power stations will be replaced by digital transmission as mandated by Congress and the Federal Communications Commission in 2005. The switch however won't have an immediate effect on Kodiak television viewers or others in rural Alaska, at least not in the short term.For more information, visit the National Association of Broadcasters' Low Power TV answers page.

KMXT's Erik Wander has more.

The only television signals broadcast in Kodiak, including Alaska Rural Communications Service, or ARCS, and Alaska One, are Low Power TV, which will not be converting to a digital signal this week. Steve Hamlin, technical manager for Alaska Public Broadcasting Incorporated in Anchorage, said Low Power Television is not included in the digital conversion mandate.

-- (Hamlin 1 30 sec. "The FCC has required ... and use your analog television.")

Hamlin said there is no such digital TV service currently available in Kodiak, so local residents will be able to continue watching television without a digital converter box. However, he said there still may be reason to get one now, including preparing for a possible future switch to digital for Low Power TV and taking advantage of a federal coupon program providing a 40-dollar voucher toward the purchase of a converter box.

-- (Hamlin 2 45 sec. "There are some people ... because there probably isn't.")

Hamlin said that if people

in Kodiak do get a converter box and intend to hook it up right away, they should make sure it has "pass-through" capability, which allows it to receive an analog signal, and that there will be no change in quality.
Without the pass-through function, viewers won't be able to see their usual TV signal at all. He said most digital television sets have analog receivers built in, but he's not sure that will always be the case.

-- (Hamlin
3 32 sec. "Some places stopped selling ... an analog tuner in it.")

In addition to delivering better quality image and sound, part of the reason for the switch to digital was to free up the analog spectrum for other uses, such as public-safety and emergency radio transmissions. However, Hamlin said freeing up bandwidth is a non-issue in rural Alaska.

-- (Hamlin
4 50 sec. "All the big stations who were ... bandwidth in bush Alaska.")

Converter boxes are available in Kodiak, but calls to local retailers revealed that stocks are low. Wal-Mart carries the boxes, but is currently out of stock with more on the way. Island TV also carries them, and can special order them for customers, but had only one in stock. Hamlin said he expects a definitive decision from the FCC regarding Low Power TV by the end of summer, once the full power conversion to digital is complete.

I'm Erik Wander.

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