

## COUNTDOWN TO UK'S FIRST SWITCH BEGINS

The date on which the UK's switch to digital TV will begin was announced today by Digital UK, the body leading the process.

Ford Ennals, Chief Executive of Digital UK, said Whitehaven and the surrounding Copeland area of Cumbria will have its first analogue signal (BBC2) turned off and replaced by digital services on **October 17** this year. The remaining three analogue channels will be switched off four weeks later on November 14. The two-stage process will then be repeated elsewhere, across the UK, until switchover completes in 2012.

Today also sees the launch of a range of help measures for the 25,000 households in Whitehaven and the surrounding switchover area. Letters are being sent to every household explaining the Digital Switchover Help Scheme, which will provide digital television equipment and installation to those aged 75 and over and those with certain disabilities. Digital UK is working with local charities and volunteers, led by Age Concern, to provide practical assistance to those who fall outside the scheme, such as pensioners under 75.

The Whitehaven countdown also signals the start of the latest Digital UK communications campaign. It includes new television and radio trails, sponsorship of Channel 4's afternoon quiz show *Countdown* and a schools scheme providing primary teachers with a range of switchover-themed materials linked to the National Curriculum.

Ford Ennals said: "Switchover has been years in the planning and with today's announcement it becomes a reality. Today, for the first time, we can provide details of exactly how the process will be carried out not just in Whitehaven but across the UK."

Broadcast Minister Shaun Woodward added: "The countdown to a digital future has begun. In October, Whitehaven will start the process of digital switchover. Residents will be able to reap the benefits of a greater choice of TV channels and better quality pictures and sound.

"Arrangements are in place to ensure Whitehaven residents get the help and support they need. This will help to ensure the UK switch to digital is as smooth as possible."

Jamie Reed, MP for Copeland and chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Switchover, said: "Switchover will end the unfairness of many of my constituents not having access to digital television through an aerial. All eyes will be on Whitehaven and Digital UK must continue its good work and make sure it gets the switchover right."

- end; notes follow -

## Notes

Switchover will increase people's choice by making digital terrestrial television (commonly known as Freeview) available to all parts of the UK. One in four households cannot currently receive Freeview channels. Of the other digital platforms, satellite is available in Whitehaven, but cable is not.

### How the UK's first switchover will happen

- From early May, captions will start appearing on analogue channels in Whitehaven and the surrounding area, warning viewers that the set they are watching must be adapted.
- On October 17, BBC2 will cease broadcasting in analogue to Whitehaven, and the first group of Freeview digital channels: BBC1, BBC2, BBC Three, BBC News 24 and CBBC will become available.
- During this transitional stage, analogue ITV1 will move to button 2 on remote controls to make way for the first group of digital channels.
- Four weeks later (November 14), the remaining analogue channels will also be permanently switched off. Every home in the area will then be able to receive at least 18 Freeview channels, including ITV2, E4 and BBC Four, plus digital radio, via an aerial.
- The rest of the country will follow the same two stage process, carried out transmitter by transmitter, between 2008 and 2012.

### The Digital Switchover Help Scheme

- All households in the Whitehaven area are being sent a letter explaining the Help Scheme for the over-75s and those with significant disabilities or who are registered blind or partially sighted.
- The scheme is designed to help those who have not yet switched to digital, and will provide the equipment necessary to convert one television and help with installation. There will be a one-off, subsidised fee of £40. For eligible households on income-related benefits, the help will be free.

### About Digital UK

- Digital UK is the independent, not-for-profit organisation leading digital television switchover in the UK. Digital UK has been set up by the public-service broadcasters and multiplex operators.

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