

Wednesday 14 November 2007

UK'S FIRST TV SWITCHOVER COMPLETED

Whitehaven goes all-digital at 03:27 am

Whitehaven in Cumbria today became the first area of the UK to switch to all-digital television services.

The last three analogue television channels (BBC1, ITV1 and Channel 4) were switched off locally at 02:00 am. At 03:27 am, 20 Freeview channels and 10 radio stations started broadcasting to 25,000 households in and around Whitehaven. The line-up includes BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, BBC News 24, ITV1, ITV2, ITV3, ITV4 Channel 4, E4, More 4, Five.¹

Ford Ennals, Chief Executive of Digital UK, the independent body co-ordinating switchover, said:

"I'm delighted that today thousands of people in Whitehaven will be able to enjoy the great choice and extra features that digital TV has to offer. This is a big day both for the area and for television in the UK, and I'd like to thank all those who have helped ensure the first switchover has gone smoothly.

"Our immediate priority is to make sure assistance is available to those who need it. I'd like to reassure the few people who have yet to switch, or who may need advice on issues such as retuning their new equipment, that we'll be on hand in the coming weeks to provide practical support."

In addition to a helpline (0845 6 50 50 50) and website (www.digitaluk.co.uk), Digital UK is running help centres at four locations across the Whitehaven switchover area. The centres, run in partnership with Age Concern Northwest Cumbria, provide advice and practical assistance with digital TV equipment.

The Digital Switchover Help Scheme² has so far provided subsidised equipment and installation to more than 2,000 households in the Whitehaven area. Those who are eligible can still apply for help for another month (until December 13) and ongoing support is available until April next year.

Across the UK, one-in-four households are currently unable to receive digital television through an aerial. Between 2008 and 2012 switchover will extend digital TV coverage via an aerial across the whole country.

The next area to switch over is Scottish Borders in November 2008, followed by Westcountry, Wales and Granada starting in 2009.

- ends; notes follow -

1. In place of the four analogue terrestrial channels, 25,000 homes in Whitehaven and the surrounding communities can now receive the following digital services through an aerial:

- 20 Television channels: BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, CBeebies, CBBC, BBC News 24, BBC Parliament, BBCi interactive channels, ITV1, ITV2, ITV3, ITV4, CITV, Channel 4, Channel 4+1, E4, More 4, Five,² Community Channel
- 10 radio networks: BBC Radio 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Live, BBC Radio Five Live Sports Extra, 6 Music, BBC 7, Asian Network, 1 Xtra
- Digital text services: BBCi, Teletext, Teletext on 4, Teletext Cars

Switchover in Whitehaven was the first step in a nationwide programme (from 2008 – 2012) which will ensure free terrestrial digital television (Freeview) is available to virtually all UK households. Currently one-in-four homes across the country are not able to receive digital TV via an aerial.

2. The Digital Switchover Help Scheme is open to those aged over 75 or with a significant disability or who are registered blind or partially sighted. The scheme offers the help and equipment necessary to convert one television to digital. There is a one-off, subsidised fee of £40. For eligible households on certain income-related benefits, the help is free.

Digital UK is the independent body implementing the UK's switch to digital television. The company communicates switchover to the public; manages the upgrade of 1,154 transmitters for digital; and works with industry to ensure understanding and support for switchover. Digital UK was set up by the public-service broadcasters, and offers independent switchover advice to the public through its helpline (08456 50 50 50) and website (digitaluk.co.uk).

Switchover will create a fairer situation in which everyone has access to a choice of affordable digital TV services. Between 2008 and 2012, all TV services in the UK will go completely digital, region by region. The UK's old analogue television signal is being switched off and replaced with a digital signal, a process that will also allow the UK to remain a world leader in broadcasting.

Images of switchover and Digital UK are available to media, free of charge, from vismedia.co.uk

Contacts

Joe Smithies
020 7462 5442

joe.smithies@digitaluk.co.uk

Fishburn Hedges (PR)
Rosie Strachan, Kate Brader
020 7839 4321

digitaluk.co.uk/press