

100 DAYS TO UK'S FIRST SWITCHOVER

Switchover chief says late converters risk blank screens

One hundred days before the UK's first digital television switchover, new research reveals that all households in the lead area of Whitehaven,¹ Cumbria, are intending to convert to digital TV.

Ford Ennals, Chief Executive of Digital UK, the organisation implementing the switch, welcomed the findings, but also warned residents not to leave it too late.

Mr Ennals said: "It's good news that everyone we spoke to said they were intending to convert to digital. However, we also found that over a third (34%) of households yet to convert are planning to convert 'at and around switchover', which increases the risk of problems, and a further third have still to decide. Too many people converting late would put a strain on suppliers of equipment, installers and other sources of support."

The research,² which tracks Whitehaven's state of readiness for switchover, found:

- 96% of the Whitehaven respondents were aware of switchover
- 76% of households have already converted to digital television
- 74% knew that switchover is happening in October
- 34% of analogue households intend to convert "at or after switchover"
- All households surveyed said they intended to convert to digital television

Mr Ennals added: "To avoid the risk of being left with a temporary blank screen, I'd urge people to make preparations in good time before analogue signals are turned off. The first digital signals are available from next month when Five begins broadcasting in the area, so there's no need to wait. If too many people leave it to the last minute, they may be disappointed and simply not get be able to get their TVs converted in time."

The two stage process for 25,000 homes in Whitehaven begins on October 17, when the analogue BBC2 signal will be turned off and the initial group of Freeview digital channels will be broadcast for the first time. Four weeks later, on November 14, the remaining analogue channels will cease transmission and the full line up of 20 free-to-air digital channels will become available.

As the countdown gets closer Digital UK is stepping up its communications campaign. From later this month, every household will receive a 20-page guide called 'It's time to switch' and on-screen reminder captions will be broadcast on analogue channels. More information about the Digital Switchover Help Scheme,³ which has already received almost 3,000 applications, will be sent to eligible households and drop in advice sessions will be held across the switchover area.

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Mr Ennals said: "There is plenty of information available via our helpline – 08456 50 50 50, on our website – digitaluk.co.uk or face-to-face from our local team. We're also working closely with Age Concern to support those who may need a bit of extra help. If people take advantage of the assistance available and act in good time, Whitehaven can look forward to a successful switchover."

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Notes to editors

¹ The Whitehaven switchover area covers most of the borough of Copeland in West Cumbria. The area contains approximately 25,000 households and 60,000 residents. Approximately seven out of ten households in the area have digital television via satellite on at least one set.

² Data from Ofcom/Digital UK Switchover Tracker (Q1 and Q2, 2007)

When are you planning to convert to digital TV?

9 months before:	1%
6 months before:	8%
3 months before:	14%
At switchover:	26%
After switchover:	8%
When Government or council does it for me:	9%
Don't know:	33%

Awareness data from Ofcom/Digital UK Switchover Tracker (Q2 2007)

³ The Digital Switchover (Disclosure of Information) Act 2007 allowing social security information to be shared with the Help Scheme operator received Royal Assent on June 18.

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

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