

COUNTDOWN BEGINS TO WEST SWITCHOVER

The West TV region will switch to digital TV on 24 March 2010, it was announced today by Digital UK, the independent body in charge of the process.

Switchover will make digital terrestrial television (Freeview) available to virtually every home in the West region¹ – including, for the first time, more than 140,000 households served by local ‘relay’ transmitters.

When analogue signals are switched off and replaced with digital broadcasts at these sites, the number of channels available free via an aerial will increase from four to around 20.

Analogue services will be switched off in two stages at each transmitter group. At stage one, BBC Two will cease broadcasting in analogue and the first group of Freeview digital channels will become available from relay transmitters. Two weeks later, the remaining analogue channels will be permanently switched off and replaced with additional digital services.²

Bill Taylor, Digital UK’s South West Regional Manager, said: “Today’s announcement is a real step forward in the digital TV switchover programme. Once the process is complete, virtually all viewers will have the opportunity to enjoy digital TV through an aerial, offering many homes more choice than ever before.”

Latest research indicates nine out of ten people in the West region are now aware of digital switchover, and 87% have already converted their main TV set. Other findings from the Digital UK/Ofcom Switchover Tracker (to September 2008) revealed:

- 63% of homes in the area have already converted all their sets to digital
- 86% recognise the ‘digital tick’ logo, which identifies products designed to keep working after switchover
- 91% say they are not concerned about switchover

As part of Digital UK’s national information campaign, leaflets explaining switchover and the options available for going digital will be sent to every home. These will be backed up by both national and local radio and television advertising. Six months before switchover, on-screen captions reminding viewers to get ready will appear on the television sets of those still watching analogue broadcasts. Digital UK is also working in partnership with local charities and volunteers to provide advice and assistance for those who may need a little extra help.

Letters will be sent to every household eligible for help from the Switchover Help Scheme, which offers assistance and equipment to convert one television for people aged 75 or over, registered blind or partially sighted, on certain disability benefits or living in a care home for six months or more. Those eligible will be contacted directly, offered help and sent information packs in time for switchover.

Karen Farnworth of the Switchover Help Scheme in the West region said: “We will be writing to everyone who is eligible for the scheme, explaining exactly what help is available and what needs to be done. The most important thing is not to worry – we will be in touch.”

- ends; notes follow -

Notes to editors

1. Includes all viewers receiving ITV West except those in the **Cheltenham and Gloucester** area who get their signal from the Ridge Hill transmitter. These viewers will switch to digital between **April and June 2011** – exact dates to be announced.

The West TV region has four main transmitters and 59 relay transmitters. A map showing their location can be found at: www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/ifi/tech/transmaps/westv1.6.pdf

Transmitter group	Area served	Stage 1	Stage 2
Mendip *	Parts of Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Bristol	24 March 2010	7 April 2010
Bristol Ilchester Crescent	Parts of Bristol	24 March 2010	7 April 2010
Bristol Kings Weston	Parts of Bristol	24 March 2010	7 April 2010
Ridge Hill *	The Cheltenham & Gloucester area	April – June 2011, exact dates tbc.	

* These switchover dates have been adjusted in order to reduce possible interference with transmitters in neighbouring areas.

2. **Freeview channels** After switchover, virtually all UK households will receive the most watched free to air digital channels and text services. These will include the public service channels BBC One, BBC Two, ITV1, Channel 4 and Five, plus associated digital channels such as ITV2, E4 and BBC Three. Viewers who receive their television signal from a main transmitter will receive more than 40 channels, including Freeview channels plus optional subscription services such as Top Up TV and Setanta Sport. Those who receive their television from a relay transmitter will receive around 20 channels. Viewers can use the postcode checker at digitaluk.co.uk to check which channels are available in their area.
3. To continue watching TV via an aerial after switchover, analogue viewers will need to convert their television using a digital box. Subscription and non-subscription digital TV services are also available via satellite, cable and broadband.

Digital Television Switchover is the process of converting the UK's terrestrial television system to digital. Between now and 2012, analogue channels will be switched off region by region and replaced with free-to-air digital TV and radio services (Freeview). Switchover will extend Freeview coverage to the whole of the UK and free up airwaves for new services such as ultra-fast wireless broadband and mobile television.

Digital UK is the independent, not-for-profit organisation established in 2005 to implement digital switchover. It is jointly owned and funded by the public-service broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, S4C and Teletext), and the digital multiplex operators.

The Switchover Help Scheme is run by the BBC under an agreement with the Government to help older and disabled people make the change to digital TV. Every eligible person will be offered practical help to convert one of their TV sets to digital in the run-up to switchover in each region. People are eligible if they are aged 75 years or more, have lived in a care home for six months or more, get (or could get) certain disability benefits, or are registered blind or partially sighted. Most people will be asked to contribute £40 towards the help but for those on certain income-related benefits, it's free.

Images and video clips are available to media free of charge from vismedia.co.uk

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