

WHITEHAVEN PREPARES FOR UK'S FIRST SWITCHOVER

One month to the start of switchover, two months to the finish

The people of Whitehaven are gearing up to become the first viewers in the UK to switch to digital television in one month's time, according to latest research.

With the first stage of switchover on October 17 just 30 days away, nearly eight out of ten homes in the area have already got digital television or have bought Freeview boxes to convert their analogue sets. The second stage of switchover takes place on November 14 when all analogue television broadcasts will cease.¹

Digital UK is now starting its final wave of communications to make sure viewers know what's happening and how to prepare. Local advertising and targeted mailings will be used to remind those eligible for the Digital Switchover Help Scheme that October 17 is also the deadline to request installation of equipment before the final analogue switch off four weeks later.

Findings from the Digital UK research, carried out jointly with Ofcom, included:

- All respondents (100%) are aware of switchover
- 78% of households either have digital TV already (Sky) or have bought Freeview boxes² in preparation for the first terrestrial digital services starting on October 17
- 82% are aware of receiving an information leaflet from Digital UK
- 84% understand how to prepare for switchover
- 67% know that VCRs as well as analogue televisions are affected by switchover
- 87% know switchover starts in October and 49% know the exact date

The research also indicated that significant numbers of people reliant on analogue television may consider converting their sets late or even after switchover. Nearly one in five (17%) said they didn't know when they would convert and 5% said they intend to wait until after switchover.

Ford Ennals, Chief Executive of Digital UK, said: "Whitehaven is about to make broadcasting history. Nine years after the first digital TV signals began in the UK, the first analogue channel will be turned off. We will be on hand to offer last-minute help and support as switchover approaches, and to encourage as many people as possible to get the equipment they need in good time."

Stephen Timms, Minister for Competitiveness, will visit Whitehaven tomorrow (September 18) to witness final preparations being put in place by Digital UK, the body in charge of switchover, as well as retailers and partners such as the BBC, which is operating the Help Scheme.

- ends; notes follow -

Notes:

1. The two stage switchover process for 25,000 homes in the borough of Copeland (including the town of 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.
2. Approximately 70% of households have already gone digital via satellite (Sky). Of the remaining analogue households, 28% have bought Freeview boxes ready to convert analogue sets.

GfK/NOP research based on face to face interviews with 91 households, August 2007.

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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