

Spectrum Auction Process: How Viewers May Be Affected

Reshuffling the Airwaves

As part of the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) spectrum incentive auction process, the FCC will "repack" the TV stations (moving their channel assignments to free up the largest amount of spectrum possible for wireless services) that choose to remain in business following the auction.

This is the same process that occurred when TV stations transitioned to all-digital broadcasting in 2009 (the DTV transition), but this time, stations will not have a second channel to operate to ensure continuity of service.

If a station is forced to move to a new channel assignment, a number of technical activities must occur that may cause the station to go off the air for a period of time, denying viewers the important local news and information on which they depend. Broadcasters want to ensure the FCC provides advanced notice of a repacking strategy and time for stations to comment on the plan before it is finalized to minimize this risk.

Case Study: A Local Station

Here's an example of what a typical station might experience.

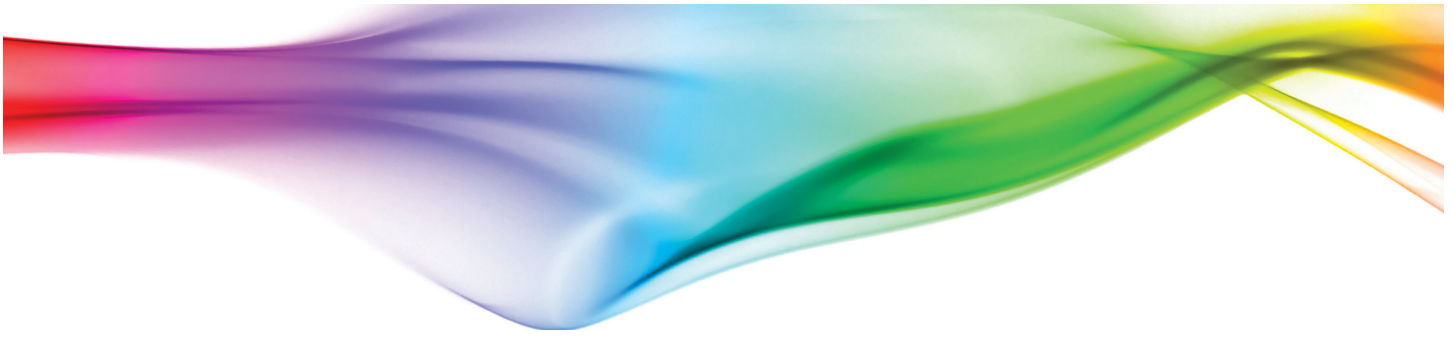
Once a local station receives notice from the FCC that it must move from its current channel (for example, channel 45) to its new channel (for example, channel 26), station engineers and contractors go to work, and:

1. Install a temporary antenna and transmission line on channel 45 to continue operating while constructing the new facility on channel 26
2. If they cannot retune the existing transmitter to the new channel, they will have to order a new transmitter, transmission line and antenna
3. Order and install a new channel 26 output mask filter, a device that prevents interference with other TV stations in the same area
4. Remove the original antenna and transmission line
5. Install the new transmission line and antenna
6. Conduct proof of performance testing on the new channel, as is required by the FCC
7. Transition to the new channel
8. Dismantle the old transmitter, temporary antenna and transmission line

Station Considerations

TV stations must keep in mind that there are a limited number of equipment manufacturers and crews licensed and capable of installing the new equipment. Because there could be significant time required to order, receive and install equipment, viewers may be impacted. Stations could also experience higher costs than they first anticipate. By asking the FCC to provide ample notice of a repacking strategy, broadcasters hope to minimize this impact.

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TV stations also must consider that transitioning to a new channel may come at a significant cost:

- 55 percent of stations operate older equipment that cannot be upgraded to a new channel
- About 40 percent of equipment may be upgraded, but replacement cost may be more than the cost of new equipment
- Only about 5 percent of stations can transition to a new channel using their existing transmitters and antennas

Bottom line

It is important that members of Congress understand the impact repacking could have on their constituents – our TV viewers. It's critical that stations and their viewers be given adequate time to understand and prepare for the FCC's repacking plan to minimize the risk of stations being forced off the air and unavailable for viewers.

For updates on the spectrum incentive auction process, visit **TheFutureofTV.org**.



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