

COMMISSION PROPOSES ADOPTION OF
DIGITAL TELEVISION BROADCAST STANDARD
(MM Docket No. 87-268)

The FCC today took an important step forward towards the introduction of a digital television (DTV) broadcast standard. The Commission proposed adopting, as the technology for terrestrial broadcast in the United States, the Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC) DTV Standard. Specifically, the Commission proposed requiring broadcasters that transmit digitally to use the ATSC DTV Standard. The Commission took this action so that all affected parties have sufficient confidence and certainty in order to promote the smooth introduction of a free and universally available digital broadcast television service.

The proposed standard is the culmination of over eight years of work by the Commission's federal Advisory Committee on Advanced Television Service (ACATS), the ATSC, the Advanced Television Test Center (ATTC), and the members of the Grand Alliance who designed and built the system tested. As recommended to the Commission, it is dynamic, flexible and high quality. The technology provides a variety of formats that will allow broadcasters to select the one most appropriate for their program material, from very high resolution providing the best possible picture quality to multiple programs of lower resolution, which could result in increased choice for viewers. Even at the lower resolutions, the recommended system represents a clear improvement over the current NTSC standard. The recommended system also permits transmission of text and data. The standard has been endorsed by, among others, a subgroup of the federal government's Information Infrastructure Task Force, the 1994 NIST/ARPA Workshop on Advanced Digital Video, and the Information Technology Industry Council. The system represents a rare opportunity to increase significantly the use of broadcast spectrum while remaining flexible enough to incorporate future improvements.

Previously, the FCC has recognized that standards provide desirable certainty to equipment manufacturers, broadcasters, programmers and consumers. The Commission also recognized that government mandated standards may impose costs by freezing the state of the art, erecting barriers to innovation, or limiting competition. To address concerns that Commission rules do not discourage technological innovation and competition and that they do not regulate more or longer than necessary, the Commission proposed to do one or more of the following: rely upon current processes to consider any future changes if circumstances warrant; commit to reviewing the Standard at some future time; or adopt a sunset provision making adherence to the Standard no longer a governmental requirement after an established period. The Commission also sought comment on alternatives to requiring each element of the ATSC DTV Standard.

Today's Notice is the second of three which, when taken together, will provide a complete and current record upon which the Commission will base its final Report and Order to usher in the next era of broadcast services. The first of this trilogy was issued August 9, 1995 and covered various policy issues created by the introduction of a digital broadcast service. The third will consider the allocation and assignment of channels to eligible parties.

Action by the Commission May 9, 1996, by Fifth Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 96-207). Chairman Hundt, Commissioners Quello, Ness, and Chong, with each issuing a separate statement.

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