

REAL ESTATE

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Has your home gone digital?

In 16 days, some area residents could be turning on their televisions and seeing nothing but static.

Of course, unless you have been living in a cave for the last several months, you know what is coming. On Feb. 17, all broadcast television stations will be required to change from analog to digital broadcasting.

While I am sure you are aware of this transition, are you ready for it? If, like me, you watch television that comes to you via cable or satellite, you have nothing to worry about. The cable and satellite providers have updated their equipment, and you should notice no difference on Feb. 17.

If, however, you are part of the estimated 18 percent of households in this region that receive their television signal over the air via an antenna, you have some work to do to avoid seeing only "static" on your television screen.

If you are one of those that rely on an antenna to get your television signal and you choose not to subscribe to cable or satellite, you have a couple of options.

First, you could go out and buy a new

television set. The switch to digital and the current economic challenges have resulted in retailers offering some great buys on all types and sizes of television. Your new TV will have a digital receiver, so you will be able to watch television as usual after Feb. 17.

In case you are wondering how to be sure your new TV is digital, the law requires that any nondigital sets be clearly marked on the box, to avoid any confusion.

If you do not want to go out and buy a new set, you can get a converter box that will convert the digital signal to analog so that you can continue to watch your favorite program on your old set. The government is making \$40 coupons available to offset some of the costs of the converter boxes, which range from \$40 to \$70 each.

You will need a separate box for each television in your home, and each household is entitled to two coupons.

However, funding for the converter boxes is running out; so you may be put on a waiting list if you haven't gotten your coupons yet. As of this writing, federal officials were

considering delaying the Feb. 17 deadline to allow more homes to obtain the coupons; but no decision had been made.

For more information on the coupons and their availability, you can visit www.dtv2009.gov or call 1-88-388-2009 (voice) or 1-877-530-2634 (TTY).

In case you are wondering why the government is doing this, there are several reasons. The switch to digital will free up parts of the valuable broadcast spectrum for public safety communications, such as those for police and fire departments.

Some of the spectrum will be auctioned off to companies that will be able to provide consumers with more advanced wireless services.

In addition, digital broadcasting will offer improved picture and sound quality for consumers and allow broadcasters to provide more programming options for viewers.

The conversion to digital television is just the latest change fueled by technology to affect our lives. Today, technology is all around us and is changing the way we live. In

addition to floor plans, location, etc., home buyers may be checking out how high-tech their home is when they make their buying decision.

Some of the things technology-minded buyers will look for include:

Is your home wired for DSL or other high-speed Internet connections? Also, does your home have a local area network to link computers?

If you already have these high-tech updates, buyers will want to know how accessible they are. Are there sufficient outlets in every room for cable television, Internet access and telephone? Plus, are their sufficient electrical outlets to power all the equipment?

Is your home equipped with a security system? Modern security systems can turn lights on and off when you are away, monitor many of your home's systems and provide valuable peace of mind for the homeowner.

Does your home have multi-zoned heating and cooling with programmable thermostats? These updates will not only make your



YOUR PLACE TO CALL HOME

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home more comfortable, but save energy and money.

Is your home prewired for home theater or multi-room audio and video? Whether you watch television and movies in your family room or a media room, surround sound and home theaters are sought-after amenities for many families.

For more information on which high-tech upgrades will add value to your home, contact your Realtor.

For more information on why 2009 is the right time for real estate, contact your Realtor or visit www.RightTimeForRealEstate.com.

State offers housing stimulus program

The Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC) recently announced a new program available for first-time home buyers.

The MHDC is now offering a program to help home buyers take advantage of the \$7,500 federal first-time home buyer tax credit.

In addition, the tax credit will be available for the first time as an interest-free cash loan at closing.

Missouri is currently the only state to offer this program, according to a news release from state Rep. Sally Faith, R-15th District.

The commission's action is the result of one of eight recommendations made in the final report of the Speaker's Special Task

Force on the Housing Market. Then-House Speaker Rod Jetton appointed the task force last summer.

This new program will provide the value of the tax credit at the time of closing to help first-time home buyers cover down payment and closing costs.

The MHDC will provide a short-term, advanced loan of up to 6 percent of the home purchase price or a maximum of \$6,750, to qualified first-time home buyers.

The home buyer then would file for the federal tax credit and use it to pay back the Housing Development Commission for the loan and service fee.

According to the National Association of Home Builders' economics department, for

every \$1,000 increase in the cost of an average priced new home, 217,000 households are priced out of the market for that home.

This additional \$6,750 will allow more first-time home buyers the ability to purchase their first home, according to Faith's news release.

Infusing more first-time buyers into the market is expected to help in removing the "toxicity" that has been in the housing market and is expected to help jump-start the housing industry.

MHDC is the state's housing finance agency. According to the commission's website, all MHDC first-time home buyer loans are made through a statewide network of certified lenders, and serviced by U.S. Bank.

The MHDC loan programs are available for households with incomes up to \$85,500. Interested first-time home buyers can find a list of participating lenders and other information about the program at www.mhdc.com.

Speaker's task force

In August 2008, Jetton named a special task force of citizens from across Missouri and directors of key state agencies along with two state representatives to study the housing market and determine actions the Legislature could take to help turn around the troubled market.

The task force met four times in Jefferson

City and heard presentations from economists, directors of key agencies and other experts in real estate and housing. In its final report, the task force noted eight specific actions that could accelerate the recovery of the market.

The eight recommendations complement current Speaker Ron Richard's Family Recovery Plan. The recommendations call for, among other items, a fair assessment of real estate, assuring the potential for affordable workforce housing, reducing and alleviating burdensome regulations and getting Missourians back to work in the housing industry, which is comprised of thousands of workers and small businesses in dozens of trades across the state.