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FCC Consumer Advisory

Analog-to-Digital Transition for Wireless Telephone Service

The Analog Cellular Sunset and Who Is Affected

As of midnight on February 18, 2008, cellular telephone companies will not be required to provide analog service. While most wireless telephone users will not be affected by this transition (often called the “analog cellular sunset”), some users may be affected. In addition, the transition could affect some alarm systems and some users of OnStar in-vehicle communications service.

You will not be affected by the transition if you:

- use a digital handset; or
- subscribe to wireless service from Sprint/Nextel or T-Mobile.

You may be affected by the transition if you:

- use an analog-only handset (there are very few of these left in service); and
- receive service from a cellular telephone company, including AT&T Mobility, Verizon Wireless, Alltel, US Cellular, and Dobson (and other companies that market their services as “Cellular One”); or if you
- use service that may rely on analog cellular radio equipment, such as an alarm system with a wireless radio link or OnStar service in an older vehicle.

Wireless Telephone Customers

All cellular telephone companies must notify their analog customers at least four months before discontinuing analog service, and again at least 30 days before discontinuing analog service.

If you use an analog-only or dual-mode analog-digital handset and “roam” into another provider’s service area (for example, when traveling), your roaming coverage may be affected by the transition. To determine how your roaming service may be affected by the transition, ask your wireless telephone company if any of its roaming partners will discontinue their analog service after February 18, 2008.

How to Tell Whether Your Handset Is Digital or Analog

If you don’t know whether your current handset is digital or analog, there are several ways to find out. If your wireless phone has advanced features such as text or instant messaging, Internet browsing, an MP3 player, or an integrated camera, it is digital. If your wireless phone uses a SIM card (a small, removable card that can be found under your phone’s battery), it is digital. Some wireless phones display an icon indicating that they have digital capabilities. If you have an older model “bag” phone, it is probably analog. Many wireless telephone companies have helpful information about their analog-to-digital transition plans on their Web sites. If you have any questions about the type of handset you have, contact your wireless telephone company or the retailer where you bought it.

Alarm System Users

The majority of alarm systems installed in homes and businesses do not use a wireless radio signal to connect to a central monitoring station. Some alarm systems, however, use analog radio equipment and send a wireless signal – provided by a wireless telephone company – using the 800 MHz spectrum. These systems are affected by the transition. According to the alarm industry, out of a total 26 million installed alarm systems, there are approximately one million systems that use analog radio equipment. Wireless alarm systems installed before Spring 2006 generally used analog equipment.

There are several ways to tell if your alarm system will be affected by the analog-to-digital transition. Most alarm companies are contacting their affected customers by letter, bill insert, and/or telephone to arrange for replacement installation of a digital alarm radio. In many cases, if you have an analog alarm radio that has not been replaced and the analog wireless network stops operating, the radio will emit a “beep” or warning tone. If you believe your alarm system relies on an analog wireless radio and you haven’t heard from your alarm company, or if you’re unsure about what type of alarm system you have, contact the company to determine your options for maintaining service.

OnStar Subscribers

If you drive an OnStar-equipped vehicle, your OnStar service may be affected by the analog-to-digital transition. OnStar is a mobile, in-vehicle communications service that provides telephone service, navigation information, and emergency services if you are involved in an accident. OnStar partners with a wireless telephone company to offer this service, which is currently analog-based. OnStar has informed the FCC that it will stop providing analog-based OnStar service as of midnight December 31, 2007. OnStar will then provide a digital-based service.

OnStar-equipped vehicles have one of three types of equipment: analog-only, analog/digital-ready, and dual-mode (analog and digital). OnStar advises that analog-only equipped vehicles (generally, cars older than 2003 models) cannot be upgraded and that

OnStar service in such vehicles will not work after December 31, 2007. Analog/digital-ready equipped vehicles must be upgraded in order to work after December 31, 2007. Dual-mode equipped vehicles will continue to work after December 31, 2007. To determine the type of OnStar equipment in your vehicle and whether your OnStar service will work after December 31, 2007, contact OnStar. You can contact OnStar by pressing the blue OnStar button in your vehicle, calling OnStar toll-free at 1-866-579-7726 (have your OnStar account number or your vehicle identification number available), or visiting OnStar's Web site at <https://myonstar.com/adt.os>. Enter your vehicle identification number to determine if the transition affects your vehicle.

Wireless Telephone Users with Hearing Aids

The FCC has taken steps to ensure that digital handsets are available that can be used with hearing aids. The FCC has imposed requirements and deadlines on handset manufacturers and wireless telephone companies to offer hearing-aid compatible digital handsets. See our consumer fact sheet on these requirements at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/hac.html>.

The Analog Cellular Sunset Is Not the Same as the DTV Transition

In addition to the analog-to-digital transition for wireless telephone service, Congress has separately set a deadline of February 17, 2009, for completion of the transition from analog-to-digital television broadcasting. To find out more about the digital television transition, visit our Web site at www.dtv.gov.

For More Information

For more information about this issue or any other telecommunications-related issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center by e-mailing fccinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/>.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceeding or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

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