



Cable System Encryption

Cable operators with all-digital systems may encrypt their services. If your cable operator chooses to encrypt its services, you will need a set-top box or CableCARD for every television set in your home on which you want to continue viewing cable programming.

Encryption of all-digital cable service allows operators to activate and deactivate service remotely. This means many consumers will no longer need to wait at home for a technician to activate, cancel or expand service. In addition, encryption reduces service theft, which often degrades the quality of cable service received by paying subscribers.

What does this mean for cable subscribers?

If you currently have unencrypted cable service and your cable operator begins to encrypt, you will need additional equipment – a set-top box or CableCARD – to view the newly encrypted channels.

If you need additional equipment because your provider begins encrypting service, you are entitled to free equipment for a limited time:

If, at the time your cable operator begins to encrypt, you subscribe to...	Then you are entitled to...
Only broadcast basic service and do not have a set-top box or CableCARD.	A set-top box or CableCARD on up to two television sets without charge or service fee for two years from the date your cable operator begins to encrypt.
A level of service other than broadcast basic service but use a digital television to receive only the basic service tier without use of a set-top box or CableCARD.	A set-top box or CableCARD on one television set without charge or service fee for one year from the date your cable operator begins to encrypt.
Only the basic service tier without use of a set-top box or CableCARD, and you receive Medicaid.	A set-top box or CableCARD on up to two television sets without charge or service fee for five years from the date your cable operator begins to encrypt.

Is my cable operator required to notify me of changes?

Your cable operator must notify you at least 30 days before it begins to encrypt and notify you about the equipment to which you are entitled.

Your cable operator must notify you 30 to 60 days before the end of the free equipment period. The notice must include the lease fee your cable operator will charge for the equipment going forward.

What if I subscribe to cable service after an all-digital cable operator has commenced encrypting their service?



You are not entitled to free equipment, and your cable operator is permitted to charge you its standard equipment fees for any necessary set-top boxes or CableCARDS. You may ask your cable operator for a rate card, which will specify equipment costs.

What does this mean for over-the-air television viewers and direct broadcast satellite subscribers?

If you view television over the air with an antenna or subscribe to a direct broadcast satellite service such as DIRECTV or Dish Network, cable system encryption will not impact you.

Consumer Help Center

For more information on consumer issues, visit the FCC's Consumer Help Center at www.fcc.gov/consumers.

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