

[FCC Freezes Channel Changes By Digital TV Stations While Evaluating Reallocation of Television Spectrum for Broadband Use](#)

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In another example of how seriously the FCC is considering the **reallocation of portions of the TV spectrum for wireless broadband use**, the Commission today issued a [Public Notice freezing any new petitions for changes in the channels of television stations](#). Since the DTV transition, almost 100 stations have changed channels - mostly moving from VHF to UHF channels, as television operators have in determined that VHF channels are subject to more interference and viewer complaints about over-the-air reception. Many predict that these problems with the remaining VHF stations will be worse when the new mobile DTV devices roll out later this year. Yet, as the FCC is looking at implementing its plan to recapture portions of the television spectrum for use by wireless broadband, this freeze has now been adopted. No new Petitions for channel changes will be accepted, though requests already on file will be processed.

The FCC itself has acknowledged the difficulties with the reception of digital DTV signals broadcast on VHF channels, and has [asked for public comment](#) on how these difficulties can be overcome, though many engineers seem to feel that, short of repealing the laws of physics, the quest may be an impossible one. In that [same proceeding](#), the FCC has asked about how it should **repack the television spectrum**, so that the Commission could provide a contiguous swath of spectrum for broadband users. These actions are being taken by the FCC even though, so far, there is no legislation authorizing the **incentive auctions** that would be used to pay some broadcasters to abandon their spectrum. Without such legislation, the FCC cannot move forward with its plans - thus this freeze may be in place for some time.

It is also interesting that this freeze is implemented across the country, not just in the major markets where the FCC has acknowledged that the principal spectrum crunch lies. This implies that the spectrum block that the FCC seeks to recapture is a nationwide block, not one isolated to the large markets. Thus, while small market TV stations may have thought that they did not need to worry about broadband reallocation issues, some stations in rural areas may well face the worst of all worlds - no mobile company may be willing to pay for their spectrum as there is plenty of empty spectrum in these rural areas, but these stations may nevertheless be forced to change channels

to clear a nationwide swath of spectrum for broadband use. Who will be paying for these channels changes? That, so far, is unclear.

As if TV broadcasters need any convincing, this public notice demonstrates that the FCC is serious about the reallocation of TV spectrum for broadband uses, seemingly to the exclusion of [various proposals advanced by TV broadcasters for allowing TV and LPTV stations to themselves provide broadband service](#). Broadcasters need to carefully consider their next steps to preserve their spectrum in light of this FCC action.

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