

CBC/Radio-Canada Fact Sheet

Over-the Air Transmission and the Transition to Digital/HD

On September 27, CBC/Radio-Canada filed its submission for the CRTC (Commission) Conventional Television Policy Review to elaborate the Corporation's position on over-the-air (OTA) transmission.

CBC/Radio-Canada currently operates one of the largest over-the-air television infrastructures in the world reaching 98% of Canadians with OTA signals. Together, CBC Television and Télévision de Radio-Canada maintain 654 television transmitters across Canada.

Despite these high coverage levels and availability of signals, use of over-the-air signals in Canada has been in decline for years and is now the lowest in the world. Only 12% of Canadians rely on over-the-air reception to receive their television signals.

Historically, smaller communities and rural areas lacking cable access depended heavily on OTA signals, far more so than larger urban areas. Today however, smaller and rural communities have high penetration of satellite reception and rely much less on OTA reception.

The combination of this steep decline in over-the-air reception levels in smaller, more rural markets, and the less rapid decline in many major Canadian centres, has inspired CBC/Radio-Canada to propose a more flexible approach to its over-the-air infrastructure to meet the changing needs of Canadians while ensuring coverage to the vast majority of Canadians.

CBC/Radio-Canada has proposed a hybrid approach for digital/high definition (HD) television that would comprise the following over-the-air and cable/DTH delivery mix: in major centres, 44 over-the-air digital television (DTV) transmitters would reach 80 per cent of the Canadian population. Outside of these Canadian centres, CBC/Radio-Canada would reach Canadians through cable/direct to home (DTH).

In the interests of making the most efficient use of scarce spectrum, CBC/Radio-Canada believes that a mandated shut-off date for analogue service should be implemented. By establishing a fixed date, the CRTC can ensure that the transition is completed in the most effective and low-cost manner possible while maintaining services to the vast majority of Canadians.

In this regard, CBC/Radio-Canada proposes that the Commission work with Industry Canada to establish August 31, 2011 as the mandated shut-off date for analogue television service in Canada. This date would be just over two years past the mandated shutdown date of analogue television in the U.S. CBC/Radio-Canada also recommends that the CRTC monitor developments in the U.S. and elsewhere in preparation for a mandatory shut-off to ensure that Canadians are not unduly affected by this initiative.

Finally, transition to digital/HD television does not come with any offsetting revenue. Transmission is only one aspect of the overall transition to digital/HD. In fact, the increased cost of production, including studio and equipment, is also a major element that arises in this transition.