

LCQ9: Digital terrestrial TV services

Following is a question by the Hon James To and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (February 26):

Question:

The authorities have set to switch off the analogue television (TV) broadcasting (analogue switch-off) on November 30 this year to make way for the implementation of full digital TV broadcasting from December 1 onwards. Some residents living in tenement buildings in the urban areas (such as Kam Wa Street in Shau Kei Wan) and remote areas (such as Ma Wan Village) have relayed that owing to problems relating to the reception of digital TV signals at their premises (such as poor reception or no signal at all), they currently have access to local free TV programmes (TV programmes) in analogue format only; and they will no longer be able to access TV programmes after the analogue switch-off. On the other hand, to tie in with the analogue switch-off, the Government has commissioned the Hong Kong Council of Social Service for the implementation of the Community Care Fund Digital Television Assistance Programme (the Assistance Programme) to help analogue TV households with financial need to obtain digital TV receivers (including set-top boxes or TV sets), so that they can continue to access TV programmes after November 30. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the districts currently having problems relating to digital TV signal reception, as well as the respective numbers of households involved;

(2) of the number of complaints/requests for assistance received by the authorities in the past five years relating to problems of digital TV signal reception, with a breakdown by District Council (DC) district; the number of resolved cases among those cases, with a breakdown by solution (such as the installation of small-scale transposers by the residents on their own initiatives);

(3) of the measures to help residents living in premises with problems relating to digital TV signal reception to continue to access TV programmes after the analogue switch-off; whether it will install transposers for them or resort to other means in order to enable them to steadily receive clear digital TV signals; if so, of the DC district(s) involved; and

(4) of the measures to ensure that all households benefitting from the Assistance Programme can access all TV programmes (including the programmes of Radio Television Hong Kong) after obtaining relevant receivers?

Reply:

President,

To tie in with the implementation of full digital television (TV) broadcast on December 1 this year, the Government has engaged the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) to launch the Community Care Fund Digital TV Assistance Programme (Assistance Programme) to help needy households who are still using analogue TV to purchase digital TV receivers.

Regarding the question of the Honourable Member, a consolidated reply is provided as follows:

(1) to (3) Currently, the coverage of the digital terrestrial TV services exceeds 99 per cent of the Hong Kong population. However, the hilly terrains in Hong Kong create practical difficulties for broadcasting networks to achieve 100 per cent coverage. At present, places that experience poor reception of digital terrestrial TV signals are mainly located at some remote areas of Sai Kung, North District, south of the Lantau Island and other outlying islands. Residents of individual old buildings in the urban areas with TV reception problems have also approached the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) for assistance. The OFCA does not have the information of the exact number of such households.

Over the past five years (2015 to 2019), the OFCA received a total of over 700 cases of public enquiry/complaint on poor TV reception that required on-site signal measurements. A breakdown of the figures by district is at Annex.

The OFCA is committed to helping residents resolve poor TV reception problems. It would conduct on-site signal measurements having regard to the actual situation of each case and offer technical advice to concerned residents. According to records of signal measurements, nearly 90% of the cases of TV reception related problems can be resolved or improved through the following means:

- * using TV receiving antenna with better TV reception characteristics;
- * installing additional TV signal boosters;
- * re-positioning the reception antenna to a suitable position/direction; and
- * using appropriate signal cables and connection arrangements.

Moreover, residents at remote areas may consider building their own small self-help transposers to improve the overall TV reception of the areas. Should members of the public experience difficulties in TV reception, they can contact the OFCA. The OFCA would be pleased to provide technical advice to assist the public to improve TV reception.

(4) In most of the cases, existing analogue TV households should be able to receive free digital terrestrial TV services after replacing their TV sets with digital ones or installing a digital set-top box.

Under the Assistance Programme, the contractor selected through open tender by the HKCSS will provide the eligible households with a digital TV set or set-top box, together with services including on-site installation,

channel search, collection of old analogue TV set and maintenance of the new TV set. The actual number of channels that the households can receive depends on the coverage of TV signals and the configuration of the communal aerial broadcast distribution system of their buildings. Should the households encounter problems in TV reception, they could contact the OFCA which would be pleased to provide professional advice.