

SCED speaks on switching off analogue television services

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, on the arrangements for switching off analogue television (TV) services today (February 11):

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: The formal switching off of analogue TV services will begin on November 30, 2020, that means Hong Kong will enter into an era of full digital TV broadcast from December 1, 2020.

This is in line with the global trend to have digital TV as the major broadcasting service. In so doing, we will not only improve the quality of reception, but also allow us to vacate the precious spectrum for other uses. In our plan, we intend to make use of the 160 MHz of spectrum vacated from the analogue TV for use by mobile telecommunications services, which essentially will relieve the existing congested indoor mobile hotspots, such as MTR stations. We hope this will be conducive to the overall telecom services delivery, as well as helping Hong Kong to move ahead with the smart city development initiative.

According to our study (conducted in 2017), 90 per cent of our households have already been using digital TV. This high level of penetration means that by the time we switch off analogue TV services, the majority of households will not need to make any adjustment because they have been watching TV by way of digital services. For those who are still using analogue TV sets, what they need to do is to either switch to a digital TV set, or add a set-top box if they decide to keep the old TV set if it is functioning well.

We also noticed that among those households who are still using analogue TV sets, some of them might be elderly people or people in low-income groups. We have a plan to give them some financial support for this switching. By middle of this year, we will be seeking funding from the Community Care Fund to launch a scheme to help those households in need to purchase either set-top boxes for their existing TVs or basic model digital TVs. We will discuss with the Secretariat of the Community Care Fund to work out a programme engaging non-governmental organisations to help us deal with the switching-off. We believe this will provide the needed service at a time when the switching-off is being materialised.

All in all, it is a milestone that Hong Kong will move ahead to a full digital TV era, and at the same time, making use of this opportunity to vacate some precious spectrum for improving our telecom services. I am happy to take questions.

Reporter: For the spectrum that is not going to be used for improving indoor mobile telecom services, what will it be used for? And the second question,

who will be the people now using analogue TV actually need the Government's help to switch to another TV? Who will be the people eligible for the subsidy?

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: Our intention is to use the spectrum vacated from the analogue TV for two different purposes. The first, and a more important one, is to use all these spectrum to improve the existing mobile telecom services, essentially indoor services, especially at the very congested sites such as MTR stations. The remaining will be put on reserve, in case there is any future need for digital broadcasting.

As to who will be the recipients of our subsidy, for those who are still using the analogue TV, we are now giving a very long and advance notice to them. In the coming 21 months, they can take time to switch to either a digital TV set or add a set-top box to their existing TV set. We also recognise that among these households who are still using old TV sets, some of them might be in economic need for the switching off, and some might be elderly people. That is our intention and the reason why we have the plan to apply for funding from the Community Care Fund to help them. This will obviously include recipients of existing Government assistance schemes, plus those who are receiving assistance provided by the Community Care Fund. We will devise the scheme in conjunction with the Community Care Fund in identifying who are the people who might receive such assistance, and in this process, we will also engage non-governmental organisations to help us.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)