

Background

Subscribers to satellite television service today have options for receiving broadcasts from local TV stations. Since 1999, many satellite subscribers have been able to receive local stations from their satellite TV provider using their satellite systems. This option, called “local-into-local” service, became available with the enactment of the Satellite Home Viewer Improvement Act of 1999 (SHVIA).

SHVIA permits satellite TV companies to provide a local TV station’s signal to the company’s subscribers in that station’s market, or Designated Market Area (DMA), as defined by Nielsen Media Research. SHVIA also permits satellite TV companies to provide “distant” TV stations, or stations outside the subscriber’s local television market or DMA, to eligible subscribers. For example, satellite TV companies can provide an eligible subscriber living in Billings, Montana a station from Los Angeles, California. In 2004, Congress enacted the Satellite Home Viewer Extension and Reauthorization Act of 2004 (SHVERA), which expanded programming options by allowing satellite TV companies to offer certain “significantly viewed” distant stations.

Another alternative for a subscriber to view local stations, regardless of whether or not their satellite TV company offers local-into-local service, is to install a traditional “rabbit ear” or roof-top antenna in conjunction with a satellite antenna to receive local TV stations for no charge. A subscriber’s ability to receive such over-the-air signals, however, depends on several factors, including geographic location and antenna quality.

Reception of Local TV Stations

SHVIA and SHVERA do not require satellite TV companies to offer local channels. Rather, they permit satellite companies to provide “local-into-local” service.

A satellite TV company that chooses to provide local-into-local service must provide subscribers with all of the local broadcast TV stations assigned to the subscriber’s DMA that have asked the satellite TV company to carry them. Typically, satellite TV companies also include local Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and other noncommercial stations in their local-into-local service offering. If a TV network has more than one local TV station affiliated with it operating in a particular state within the same market, the satellite TV company is required to carry only one of the stations. Check with your satellite TV company to determine your DMA, whether

Reception of Local TV Stations (cont’d.)

the company offers local-into-local service and what stations are included in the service.

Remember, if your satellite TV company doesn’t offer local stations as part of your subscription, you can always install a rabbit ear or roof-top TV antenna to receive local stations over-the-air. However, you may need additional equipment. Contact your satellite TV company to find out. You can get more information about the DTV transition for satellite TV service by viewing the FCC consumer guide at www.fcc.gov/guides/satellite-tv-dbs-subscribers-and-dtv-transition, or visiting www.dtv.gov.

(More)



Receiving Stations Outside the Local Market or “Distant” Signals

If your satellite TV company does not offer local-into-local service and you are deemed “unserved,” you may be eligible to receive distant signals or stations that originate outside of your DMA.

The term “unserved household” includes a household or subscriber that:

- cannot receive, through the use of a conventional, stationary, outdoor rooftop antenna, an over-the-air network signal of Grade B intensity as defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC);
- has a satellite dish that is permanently attached to a recreational vehicle or a commercial truck; or
- is subject to a waiver granted by the local TV station, if the household or subscriber is not predicted to be unserved. (The satellite TV company must request this waiver from the television station for the subscriber.)

Using a computer model, your satellite TV company can tell you if you are predicted to be “unserved.” If you are not predicted to be unserved, you will need waivers from local TV stations to receive distant signals.

As with local signals, your satellite TV company determines whether to provide distant signals to eligible subscribers and which distant signals to offer. Satellite TV companies also may charge an additional fee to local subscribers for these distant signals. If you qualify as an “unserved household,” you are eligible to receive no more than two distant network-affiliated signals per day for each TV network. Even if you qualify as an unserved household, you cannot receive digital programming aired at an earlier time than it would be aired by local stations in your time zone.

Receiving Stations Outside the Local Market or “Distant” Signals (cont’d.)

The 2004 SHVERA statute changed distant signal eligibility in some circumstances:

- If, as of December 8, 2004, you received distant signals because you lived in an unserved household, you may also receive local stations if the satellite TV company currently offers them, or introduces new local-into-local service in the future. If, as of December 8, 2004, you did not receive or try to receive distant signals, you are not eligible for distant service if local channels are offered.
- Alternatively, you may be receiving distant signals because you are a “*grandfathered subscriber*.” Check with your satellite TV company to determine whether you are grandfathered and what distant and local signals you may receive.
- You may be receiving distant signals because you received a waiver from one or more television stations that are predicted to serve your household. If you have such a waiver, you may continue to receive distant signals, and you also may subscribe to local-into-local service.

Reception of “Significantly-Viewed” Stations

If you subscribe to local-into-local service and don’t qualify as an “unserved household,” you may be eligible to receive some distant stations if those stations are considered “significantly-viewed.” Your satellite TV company decides whether and which significantly-viewed stations to offer. You must be subscribing to local-into-local service to be eligible to receive significantly-viewed stations. Check with your satellite TV company to see if you qualify and what stations are on the significantly-viewed list for your area.

(More)
→



Receiving Digital Signals

Satellite TV companies are offering local-into-local digital signals, including high definition (HD) signals. If a satellite TV company is offering local-into-local digital signals, it is not allowed to offer you distant digital signals, unless you were receiving them prior to December 8, 2004. If your satellite TV company does not offer local-into-local digital signals, you may still be able to receive them, including HDTV signals, over-the-air using a “rabbit ear” or roof-top antenna. Additional equipment may be required. If you are an “unserved” subscriber, you also may be eligible to receive distant digital signals, although your satellite TV company is not required to offer them.

Filing a Complaint

If you have a problem with your satellite TV service, first try to resolve it directly with your satellite TV company. If you can't resolve the problem directly, you can file a complaint concerning issues other than the availability of local and distant broadcast network signals with the FCC. You can file your complaint using an FCC online form found at www.fcc.gov/complaints.

You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

What to Include in Your Complaint

The best way to provide all the information the FCC needs to process your complaint is to thoroughly complete the online complaint form. When you open the online complaint form, you will be asked a series of questions that will take you to the particular section of the form you need to complete. If you do not use the online complaint form, your complaint should indicate the following:

- your name, address, email address and phone number where you can be reached;
- name, phone number and location (city and state) of the company that you are complaining about; and
- any additional details of your complaint, including time, date, and nature of the conduct or activity you are complaining about and identifying information for any companies, organizations or individuals involved.

For More Information

If you have questions about the availability of local-into-local service in your area, receiving distant TV signals, waiver requirements or other specific information about your satellite service, contact your satellite TV company.

For more information about SHVERA, see the FCC's information sheet at: www.fcc.gov/mb/policy/shvera.doc.

For information about other communications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau website at www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.



###

For this or any other consumer publication in an accessible format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an email to FCC504@fcc.gov.

To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, visit www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceedings or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

