

### Background

Closed captioning allows persons with hearing disabilities to have access to television programming by displaying the audio portion of a television program as text on the television screen. Beginning in July 1993, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) required all analog television receivers with screens 13 inches or larger sold or manufactured in the United States to contain built-in decoder circuitry to display closed captioning. As of July 1, 2002, the FCC also required that digital television (DTV) receivers include closed captioning display capability.

In 1996, Congress required video programming distributors (VPDs) (cable operators, broadcasters, satellite distributors and other multi-channel video programming distributors) to close caption their television programs. In 1997, the FCC set a transition schedule requiring distributors to provide an increasing amount of captioned programming, as summarized below.

### Benefits of Closed Captioning

Closed captioning provides a critical link to news, entertainment and information for individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. For individuals whose native language is not English, English language captions improve comprehension and fluency. Captions also help improve literacy skills. You can turn on closed captions through your remote control or on-screen menu. The FCC does not regulate captioning of home videos, DVDs or video games.

Different closed captioning schedules apply to English language and Spanish language programming.

### English Language Programming

- As of January 1, 2006, all “new” English language programming, defined as analog programming first published or exhibited on or after January 1, 1998, and digital programming first aired on or after July 1, 2002, must be captioned, with some exceptions.

### English Programming (cont’d)

- As of January 1, 2008, 75 percent of “pre-rule” English language programming, defined as analog programming first shown before January 1, 1998, and digital programming first shown before July 1, 2002, must be captioned, with some exceptions.

### Spanish Language Programming

Because captioning is newer to Spanish language program providers, the FCC allowed them a longer time to provide captioned programming.

- As of January 1, 2010, all “new” Spanish language must be captioned, with some exceptions.
- As of January 1, 2012, 75 percent of “pre-rule” Spanish language programming must be captioned, with some exceptions.

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## Exempt Programming

There are two categories of exemptions from the closed captioning rules.

### *Self Implementing Exemptions*

Self-implementing exemptions operate automatically and programmers do not need to petition the FCC. Examples include public service announcements that are shorter than 10 minutes and are not paid for with federal dollars, programming shown in the early morning hours (from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. local time), and programming that is primarily textual in nature. There is also an exemption for non-news programming with no repeat value that is locally produced by the video programming distributor (VPD). To see a complete list of self-implementing exemptions, visit the FCC's website at:

[www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/exemptions-closed-captioning-rules](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/exemptions-closed-captioning-rules).

### *Economically Burdensome Exemption from Closed Captioning Requirements*

The FCC has established procedures for petitioning for an exemption from the closed captioning rules when compliance would be economically burdensome. To find out about the economically burdensome exemption, visit the FCC's website at:

[www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/economically-burdensome-exemption-closed-captioning-requirements](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/economically-burdensome-exemption-closed-captioning-requirements).

A petition must include facts demonstrating that implementing closed captioning would be economically burdensome, which is defined as a significant difficulty or expense. There is no form to fill out. Electronic filing and faxes will not be accepted. A summary of the petition process is provided at the FCC website address above. While a petition is pending, the programming that is the subject of the petition is exempt from the closed captioning requirements.

## Subtitles in Lieu of Captioning

The rules provide that open captioning or subtitles in the language of the target audience may be used in lieu of closed captioning.

### Filing a Complaint

For captioning problems during non-emergency programming, you may file a written complaint with either the FCC or your VPD (*i.e.*, your cable or satellite TV service, or the TV station if you do not pay for cable, satellite or another subscription video service). If you file your complaint with the FCC, the FCC will forward the complaint to your VPD.

The FCC rules establish specific time limits for filing closed captioning complaints. Your written complaint must be filed within 60 days of the captioning problem. After receiving a complaint, either directly from you or from the FCC, the VPD will have 30 days to respond to the complaint. If you filed your complaint with your VPD and they do not respond within 30 days, or if a dispute remains, you can send your complaint to the FCC.

You can file your written complaint by using the online complaint form found at [esupport.fcc.gov/complaints.htm?sid=&id=d1e3](http://esupport.fcc.gov/complaints.htm?sid=&id=d1e3). You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554.

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## Filing a Complaint (cont'd.)

### 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 include the following information:

- Your name, street, city, county, state and zip code and other contact information such as a videophone or TTY number or email address;
- The television channel number, call sign and network;
- The name of the subscription service, if you pay to receive television;
- The location of the TV station or subscription service;
- The date and time when you experienced the captioning problem;
- The name of the program or show with the captioning problem;
- A detailed description of the captioning problem, including specifics about the frequency and type of problem (e.g., garbling, captions cut off at certain times or on certain days, captions missing only with HD programming); and
- Any additional information that may assist in processing your complaint, such as a description of your television receiver set up, including the make and model of your television or computer, if you are using a computer to receive television signals, any recording devices attached to the receiver, and the kinds of cables used to attach the components.

### Resolution of Your Complaint May Be Delayed If the Information Above Is Incomplete

You can also provide the FCC with any additional information you think appropriate (e.g., video copies of the TV schedule showing the CC logo for the program you saw without closed captioning, written-out examples of garbled captions, video recordings you made of the captioning problem, etc...).

If you choose to file your written complaint with your VPD, you can find their address in the following ways:

- If you subscribe to a pay service (e.g., cable or satellite), the VPD's contact information should be in your bill;
- If you have over-the-air broadcast only TV, the contact information for the TV station should be in the phone directory;
- All VPDs with websites must post their contact information there;
- You can go to the FCC's VPD Registry (explained below) located at [esupport.fcc.gov/vpd-search/search.action](https://esupport.fcc.gov/vpd-search/search.action).

### What to do if you experience closed captioning problems while watching a television program

If you suddenly experience closed captioning problems while watching a program on television (e.g., the captions suddenly disappear or become garbled) you may contact your VPD to report the problem at the time that the problem occurs. This contact would be made to see if you could get the problem fixed on the spot and does not have to be in writing. Because this contact is not considered to be a "complaint" (discussed above), the FCC would not become involved in its resolution.

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## What to do if you experience closed captioning problems while watching a television program (cont'd)

You can find your VPD's contact information in the following ways:

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- If you have over-the-air broadcast only TV, the contact information for the TV station should be in the phone directory;
- All VPDs with websites, must post their contact information there;
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### Finding your VPD's contact information in the VPD Registry:

- VPDs must provide the FCC with contact information for the receipt and handling of immediate closed captioning concerns by consumers (e.g., the captions suddenly disappear or become garbled), and contact information for written closed captioning complaints. This information is in the FCC's VPD Registry located at [esupport.fcc.gov/vpd-search/search.action](http://esupport.fcc.gov/vpd-search/search.action). This link to the VPD Registry is also available on the FCC's closed captioning website at [www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/caption.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/caption.html).

You need to provide only two pieces of information to find your VPD: your zip code and the type of VPD or video provider that you use. In the VPD Registry, the "type of provider" is asking for how you receive your television programming. This could be "broadcast" for over-the-air users (for example, using "rabbit ears" or a rooftop antenna), "cable," "satellite," "local telephone company" or "other." If you do not know the type of program provider you use, select "All Types" and then click on "Submit." A list of the VPDs that provide service in your zip code will appear and you can select from that list. Once your VPD's name is shown, click on "view details" for that VPD's contact information.

If you do not see the VPD you were looking for, please confirm that you entered the correct zip code. If the VPD you are looking for is still not appearing, please contact the FCC's Consumer Call Center for assistance: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322).

### For More Information

For more information about FCC programs to promote access to telecommunications services for people with disabilities, visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office website at [www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro). For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau website at [www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau](http://www.fcc.gov/consumer-governmental-affairs-bureau), or contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.

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*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](mailto: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/](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/).*

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