

Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990

[Editor's note: This article was originally written in 2004 and may have outdated content. Please refer to the DCMP's Clearinghouse of Information for updated information regarding laws, or check out the Web sites listed in this article for updated e-mail addresses as necessary.]

In 1990, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) amended the Communications Act of 1934. This amendment was called the Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990. The law went into effect July 1, 1993, and states that all TV receivers with picture screens 13 inches or larger manufactured or imported for use in the United States have built-in decoder circuitry to display closed captions. The FCC also must ensure that caption services continue to be available as new technologies are developed.

For this Act: "Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled."

FINDINGS

Sec. 2. The Congress finds that:

To the fullest extent made possible by technology, deaf and hearing-impaired people should have equal access to the television medium.

Closed-captioned television transmissions have made it possible for thousands of deaf and hearing-impaired people to gain access to the television medium, thus significantly improving the quality of their lives.

Closed-captioned television will provide access to information, entertainment, and a greater understanding of our Nation and the world to over 24,000,000 people in the United States who are deaf or hearing-impaired.

Closed-captioned television will provide benefits for the nearly 38 percent of older Americans who have some loss of hearing.

Closed-captioned television can assist both hearing and hearing-impaired children with reading and other learning skills, and improve literacy skills among adults.

Closed-captioned television can assist those among our Nation's large immigrant population who are learning English as a second language with language comprehension.

Currently a consumer must buy a TeleCaption decoder and connect the decoder to a television set in order to display the closed-captioned television transmissions.

Technology is now available to enable that closed-caption decoding capability to be built into new television sets during manufacture at a nominal cost by 1991.

The availability of decoder-equipped television sets will significantly increase the audience that can be served by closed-captioned television, and such increased market will be an incentive to the television medium to provide more captioned programming.

DISPLAY STANDARDS

Placement: Enables live and prerecorded captions to be placed *anywhere* on the TV screen, resulting in better appearance and readability of captions. This will clearly indicate who is speaking and important parts of the picture will be covered less often.

Italics: Manufacturers can choose between true italic font or italics as slanted letters to indicate vital information such as sound effects, narrators, and off-screen speakers.

Upper- and lowercase lettering: All sets are required to display lower- and uppercase letters.

C2 or second data channel: A required feature which provides viewers with a choice between two complete streams of captioning--for example, a foreign language version or a version edited to accommodate different reading levels--when program producers elect to have this second captioning choice on their productions.

Black background: Required, yet manufacturers will be allowed to offer backgrounds, as long as they continue to make available the black background at the user's option.

Indicators: Manufacturers must label television set packing boxes and the manual to inform consumers if the set does not support the options of Text mode, color characters, or lowercase characters.

OPTIONAL FEATURES

Text mode: Text mode is used to provide information services. C-SPAN uses Text mode to publish program listings and information for teachers. ABC-TV uses it to list their captioned programs. In a few agricultural states, Text mode delivers information to farmers.

Changeable character colors: The FCC encourages manufacturers to include the ability to display color characters. Because color capability will cost next to nothing in newer TV designs, it is anticipated that most televisions will incorporate this feature.

HOW TO CONTACT THE FCC

Interested persons may send in their views, opinions, and importance on captioning to the FCC.

Mail Address

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

To Contact the Chairman and the Commissioners

Chairman Michael Powell: mpowell@fcc.gov
Commissioner Kathleen Abernathy: kabernat@fcc.gov
Commissioner Michael Copps: mcopps@fcc.gov
Commissioner Kevin Martin: kjmweb@fcc.gov

To Obtain Information Via E-Mail

General information and inquiries: http://fccinfo@fcc.gov

To obtain information via telephone

1-888-Call-FCC (1-888-225-5322) Voice, toll-free
1-888-Tell-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY, toll-free
(202) 418-2555 TTY
(202) 418-0232 FAX

Internet Addresses

<http://www.fcc.gov>
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