



## Business

### Hawaii wraps up digital switch

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[Print Page](#)

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HONOLULU (AP) — As Congress considers a delay in the change to digital TV for the rest of the country, complaints have tapered off from Hawaii's month-early switch.

With fewer calls, the government plans to shut down its in-state customer support hotline Friday. After that, all calls for help will be forwarded to a national phone line.

Broadcasters and government officials said the conversion to digital went smoothly, with fewer than expected people needing assistance and only minor technical difficulties.

"There haven't been any big surprises. It's starting to taper off," said John Raymond, a Federal Communications Commission agent working at the call center Tuesday. "A lot of callers want reassurance that what they're going through is normal and expected."

Hawaii went to all-digital TV signals Jan. 15 so that broadcasters could take down analog transmission towers on the slopes of Maui's Haleakala volcano before the nesting season of the endangered Hawaii petrel.

Most of the nation was scheduled to follow suit Feb. 17.

But Congress appears poised to grant a four-month delay, with the Senate approving the measure unanimously Monday night and the House to vote as early as Wednesday. The measure would delay the switch to June 12, with broadcasters having the option of making it earlier if they want.

The most common complaint since the transition has come from viewers who bought digital converter boxes but don't pick up as many channels as they did previously, Raymond said.

It's impossible to tell exactly how many of the islands' 20,000 over-the-air TV viewers remain without signals.

"We knew we were going to lose some coverage, but what other choice did we have?" said Steve Komori, vice president of content delivery for PBS Hawaii. "Most people knew it was happening. The educational efforts really worked."

Digital signals don't travel as far as the analog signals, meaning some residents lost service. Others now receive fewer channels because broadcasters built their digital transition towers at lower elevations than their old towers, which reduces the coverage area.

PBS Hawaii still isn't providing service to an area of the Big Island as the station waits for a broken transmitter to be shipped.

Some residents on Oahu lost signals from NBC affiliate KHNL-TV because its digital tower isn't high enough, said John Fink, the station's president and general manager. The tower will be moved to a higher elevation in spring, and coverage should improve then, he said.

"There are some disappointed people who aren't able to get some broadcast signals," Fink said. "We're hoping people who are getting digital signals are experiencing their beauty."

More than 800 calls poured into the hotline on the day of the transition, but that number has since shrunk to fewer than 100 per day, Raymond said.

Many broadcasters are happy Hawaii switched to digital early and got it over with, said Mike Rosenberg,

president and general manager of KITV, Honolulu's ABC affiliate.

"I'm glad we are where we are, and not like the mainland," Rosenberg said. "Most of the people who aren't ready Feb. 17 won't be ready for whatever date."

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