

# Don't fall for digital switchover con

Our research found most aerial installers gave decent advice – but some misled our undercover callers

## IN BRIEF

In this report we help you to:

- avoid paying for a new aerial unnecessarily
- find out what the official advice is on digital switchover.

WHICH.CO.UK

What's the cheapest way to go digital?

[www.which.co.uk/switchoverexplained](http://www.which.co.uk/switchoverexplained)

## HOW MUCH IS A NEW AERIAL?

### Our guide to installation prices across Britain

You should get three quotes for any work on your home to get a good idea of prices. We called 24 aerial installers (three for each of the regions below) recommended on Which? Local ([www.which-local.co.uk](http://www.which-local.co.uk)) to get an estimate of what a new aerial from a good installer might cost. We show the minimum and maximum price we were quoted. Prices include VAT but exclude call-out fees. There were no recommended installers in Northern Ireland.

which? MONEY SAVER

	Min price (£)	Max price (£)
East Anglia	95	215
Midlands	74	140
North-east	75	138
North-west	55	129
Scotland	70	140
South-east/London	145	180
South-west	85	175
Wales	85	89

**D**igital TV switchover is a reality – 5 million homes will stop receiving analogue TV this year. You may be wondering whether you'll need a new aerial (as well as a set-top box) to receive the digital TV signal, so we've gone undercover to test advice from aerial installers.

Our findings show that most installers are not out to get your cash, but some are using the switchover to their advantage. Just over one in 10 aerial installers told us over the phone that we'd need a new aerial because of digital switchover. In reality, this is unlikely – Ofcom estimates that only 5-10% of UK homes will need a new aerial.

### Aerial con

Trading standards departments have encountered the same issues. Last year,

Leicestershire Trading Standards found that seven of the 21 aerial installers it called were misleading consumers by telling them they'd need a new aerial at switchover. Dorset Trading Standards Service contacted 14 installers – five gave this misleading advice.

### Testing the installers

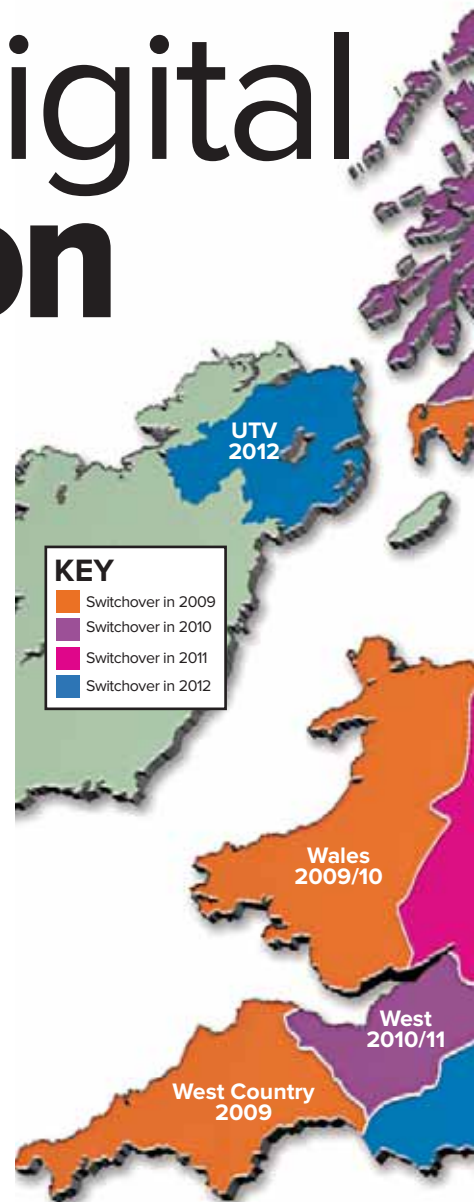
We called 61 installers in Granada (Lancashire, Liverpool and Cheshire) and the West Country – two regions switching this year – saying that we'd bought a Freeview box but a friend had said we'd need a new aerial because of the switchover. We asked whether this was true.

We said our aerial was five years old. The age of the aerial shouldn't be important, though. More often, general wear and tear will be the reason you need a new one.

Out of the 61 installers, eight (just over one in 10) said we'd need a new aerial because of the digital switchover. Only two of these asked whether we'd tested our Freeview box, while none asked what our current picture was like – two good indicators of whether we'd need a new aerial.

Eighteen installers referred to a 'digital' aerial – there's no such thing. One installer said that our five-year-old aerial was an 'analogue' aerial (which also doesn't exist) and they would recommend a 'digital' one.

Forty installers said we might need a new aerial. It's unlikely, but possible – so we don't think these installers were out to rip us off. But 18 of them told us they'd need to look at the old one before making a decision, and six of those would have charged for a call-out, so we might still have been out of pocket even if we didn't need a new aerial.



### KEY

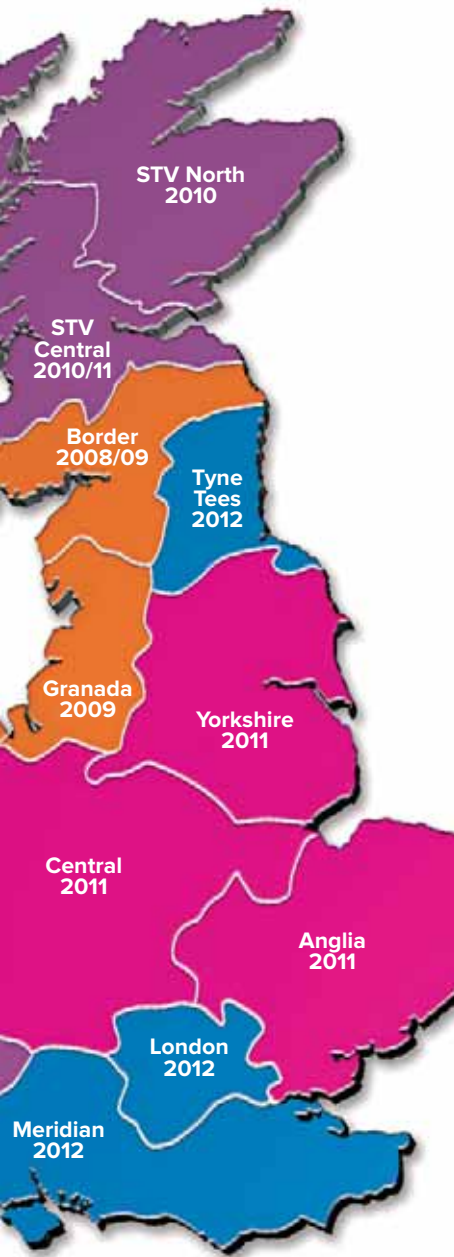
- Switchover in 2009
- Switchover in 2010
- Switchover in 2011
- Switchover in 2012

### Good advice

It was encouraging to find that some installers suggested checks we could do ourselves. Thirty-four installers asked if we had tried our Freeview box. When told that we hadn't, most said that, if it worked, we should be fine.

Three installers went further and pointed us to the free aerial checker designed by Digital UK (see 'How to test your aerial signal', opposite). This gives a good indication of what your aerial signal will be like after switchover.

Thirteen installers told us that we wouldn't need a new aerial. One told us: 'If you're happy with your picture then there's no problem. Why spend money when you don't need to?'



#### OUR RESEARCH

In February 2009, we contacted 61 aerial installers in the West Country and Granada regions, saying we had bought a Freeview box and had an aerial that was five years old, but had been told we'd need a new aerial because of digital switchover. We asked them whether this was true.

We also asked 24 aerial installers recommended on Which? Local how much it would cost to install a new aerial. We said that we'd bought a Freeview box and our picture wasn't clear.

## DO YOU NEED A NEW AERIAL?

**We asked Digital UK, the independent organisation leading the switchover process, which homes may need a new aerial. In most cases, your picture will improve considerably once digital switchover has happened in your region**

### You are unlikely to need a new aerial if:

- your current analogue picture is clear.
  - you're already using a Freeview box or satellite TV package, and it's working well.
- If your aerial's in good condition, it shouldn't matter how old it is or what region you live in. If you don't use Freeview or satellite TV and you're not sure about the condition of your aerial, visit Teletext or Ceefax page 284 (see 'How to test your aerial signal', below).

### You may need a new aerial if:

- your aerial has suffered general wear and tear, like rusting or weather damage. If you suspect this is the case, contact an aerial installer registered with the Confederation of Aerial Installers (01923 803030) or the Registered Digital Installers Licensing Body (0870 129 8015) or recommended on Which? Local ([www.which-local.co.uk](http://www.which-local.co.uk)).
- channels switch frequency when the switchover occurs, and your aerial doesn't pick them up. A few households



may experience this. Digital UK says that you should wait until switchover has taken place before getting a new aerial, though, as the chances are your current one will be fine.

## How to test your aerial signal

### Follow these simple steps to see what your signal will be like after the switchover

This test from Digital UK will tell you what your Freeview signal will be like once your region has switched, not what it's like at present, and it can be done on analogue television only. You should take the test only during the six months before your region is due to switch over. If you live in a flat and have a shared aerial, you may not be able to complete the test.

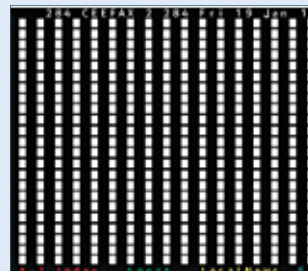
#### Step 1 Check your postcode

Use the postcode checker on the [www.digitaluk.co.uk](http://www.digitaluk.co.uk) home page to check that:

- you live in an area that will be covered by digital TV through an aerial after switchover; and
- there are no planned changes to transmitters which may mean you'll need a new aerial.

#### Step 2 Visit Teletext/ Ceefax p284

- Visit p284 on each of these channels: BBC1, BBC2, ITV1 and Channel 4 (S4C in Wales). If just one fails, you may need a new aerial at switchover.
- Wait for the pattern of blocks to be displayed. Ignore the top and bottom rows and any text characters.
- Look at the white blocks in the rest of the test pattern.
- If your screen looks like the pattern below left, the check has passed and you won't



need a new aerial. Don't worry if entire lines are missing from the screen – it has still passed the check.

- If your screen looks like the pattern below right, the check has failed and you may need a new aerial. Contact a reputable aerial installer to find out if this is the case.

#### Step 3 Check again to be sure

- Double check by waiting for the pattern of blocks to be redisplayed after the instruction page comes round again.

