



# Consumer Guide

## Choosing Cable Channels

### How are channels chosen for cable television services?

With a few exceptions, cable television systems have the right to offer whatever channels they wish on their cable systems. The cable systems negotiate agreements with the television networks regarding which channels will be carried as well as on what programming tiers they will be made available.

### Are cable companies required to include any specific channels in their lineups?

Cable systems generally are required to offer a "basic tier" of programming which must be included for all subscribers before they purchase any additional programming. This basic tier includes, at a minimum, the local broadcast television stations and the public, educational and governmental (PEG) access channels that the operator may be required to offer (through an agreement with the local government.) Cable systems may choose to add additional channels to the basic tier, but are not required to do so.

### Why did the cable system stop transmitting a local television station?

Rather than be carried automatically on the basic tier, broadcast television stations sometimes choose to enter a "retransmission consent" agreement with cable systems. When the broadcast stations and cable systems fail to reach an agreement, the local television station may be removed from the system until an agreement is reached. For more information on this, see our relevant guide at [www.fcc.gov/guides/cable-carriage-broadcast-stations](http://www.fcc.gov/guides/cable-carriage-broadcast-stations). If a local broadcast station is removed, you may be able to watch the station using an over-the-air antenna or competing video service.

### Can a cable system change its channel lineup after I sign up for a subscription?

Yes. But in most cases, cable systems are required to provide customers with notice of the channel lineup change 30 days before it takes effect unless the change is due to circumstances beyond their control (such as the failure to renew a retransmission consent agreement.)

### Are cable systems required to offer "a la carte" and pay-per-view channels?

No, but they may choose to offer channels on a stand-alone basis ("a la carte") or as a pay-per-view channel. Commission rules also prohibit cable systems from requiring customers to subscribe to any tiers beyond the basic tier in order to have access to a la carte channels or pay-per-view channels offered by the system.



## Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

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

## Accessible formats

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to [fcc504@fcc.gov](mailto:fcc504@fcc.gov).

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