

Digital Medium at Large

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Lately, TVs have had bad luck in our house. This spring, the office in our basement flooded. We had to take out all of the furniture and put it in the family room. Sadly, we also had to get rid of 'EthelVision' – our water-damaged console TV from my grandma.

While trying to get a contractor to fix our basement, all of the furniture in the family room precludes us from watching TV down there. That wouldn't be a problem except for the fact that the lamp in our TV in the upstairs living room blew up while my son was watching cartoons.

Finally, the little TV in our kitchen has a slight poltergeist problem. When you turn it on, sometimes it comes on right away. Sometimes it takes 15 minutes. Sometimes it won't come on at all. Then, to keep things interesting, it will turn itself on in the middle of the night.

Needless to say, we may be television shopping soon. Thankfully, we didn't start looking at this time last year.

The Federal Communications Commission recently fined retailers a combined \$3.9 million for failing to label analog television sets properly as subject to become essentially useless after the United States switches to digital TV next year. The retailers included Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Sears, K-Mart, Circuit City, and Target.

In addition, the FCC issued another \$2.7 million in fines to other companies for violating other digital TV rules that involve shipping analog equipment and blocking technologies such as the V-chip.

In May of 2007, the FCC adopted a rule requiring retailers to label analog-only TVs, like EthelVision, to indicate they will not receive signals without a special converter box after February 17, 2009, when the U.S. switches over to exclusively digital signals. The rule was intended to prevent consumers from buying TVs that won't work after the switch.

Although it was hard to get rid of EthelVision because of its sentimental value, that's the only value it will have next year at this time. I'm hoping some of these new plasma sets come in a console model.