

The Revolution will not be Televised

By Reg P. Wydeven
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My wife and I have been married for eight years and last Tuesday, for the first time, we got cable TV. Along with the digital cable, we got high speed internet and digital phones with caller ID, neither of which we had before. My friends can no longer accuse me of being Amish.

I got home from work late on Tuesday night, so the very first thing I saw on my new cable was Prince Fielder's winning home run against the Pittsburgh Pirates. I've slept a total of about four hours since.

I've watched sports, history, cartoons, movies, cooking, gardening and game shows. There were networks I've never heard of and old friends like ESPN. And if I actually am too tired to watch, I got a DVR that can record two shows at once!

Ever since Prince's homer, I've been addicted to cable. You might say I'm a prisoner to my cable television. But I'm not the only prisoner concerned about cable.

As if corrections officers don't have enough to worry about already, wardens all across the country are freaking out about February 17, 2009. On that date, the nation's television broadcasters switch from analog to digital signals, and prison officials could potentially lose one of the most important peacekeeping tools in prisons across the nation – television privileges.

After February 17, any television that is not hooked up to cable, satellite or a converter box will be reduced to static. While some outside the pen feel that television in prison is an undeserved luxury for inmates, corrections officials and inmates alike believe television provides a sense of normalcy and is a bargaining chip that encourages good behavior.

The government and the television industry have prepared viewers for the conversion by running ads and offering coupons that can be redeemed for the converter boxes needed to display the digital signal on older TVs, however, prisoners do not qualify for the \$40 coupons.

Purchasing the converters out of already tight corrections budgets is unlikely, as advocating for prisoners rights is always a tough cell.