

Sinclair Finds Latest Digital TV Receivers Fail to Meet Expectations In Real World Tests

HUNT VALLEY, Md., Jan. 4 /PRNewswire/ -- Sinclair Broadcast Group, Inc. (Nasdaq: SBGI) announced today that in tests it conducted in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., the latest generation of digital television (DTV) receivers failed to provide more than marginal improvement over earlier receivers, and still failed to provide acceptable over-the-air reception using simple consumer antennas.

Sinclair, which has led a widespread broadcast industry effort of several hundred television stations to augment the DTV standard with a secondary transmission system, has completed the first phase of testing of the latest-model Sony and RCA receivers. Rigorous testing conducted earlier this year with Panasonic and Pioneer DTV receivers yielded disappointing results for over-the-air reception using simple antennas. Sinclair's tests indicated that these DTV receivers were afflicted with major reception problems caused by "multipath" or reflected signals that rendered the receivers unable to provide useful picture or audio quality, regardless of the received signal strength. "We responded to reports that the newest receivers had solved the multipath problems we documented in the Baltimore tests. We were optimistic because of a recent Thomson-Multimedia (RCA) press release claiming the Thomson RCA product (DTC-100) worked in urban environments," reported Mark Hyman, Vice President of Corporate Relations. "However, based on our real world tests, such claims appear to be overstated."

In the recent tests in Baltimore, Sinclair engineers saw no improvement using the Sony receiver (KW-34HD1) over earlier generation devices and only marginal improvement with Thomson's RCA product despite the fact that signal levels were over 100 times stronger than would be theoretically required. Sinclair reported it has not yet tested the receivers in the harshest multipath environments, as both receivers failed to operate in relatively simple urban environments where today's analog television signals can be received by existing TV sets. Stated Nat Ostroff, Vice President of New Technology, "The inability to receive over-the-air broadcasts without installing expensive and cumbersome outdoor antennas leaves the consumers with no choice but to subscribe to pay television services. In my opinion, it is probably no small coincidence that DirecTV is a strategic partner of Thomson-Multimedia and that RCA's DTV sales usually include offers of satellite service."

Tests were also conducted in Washington, D.C. at a variety of prominent sites including in front of the Federal Communications Commission building and on Capitol Hill, one of the highest locations in the city and a site deemed most favorable for over-the-air reception. Even when antenna orientation was aided by expensive test equipment, the DTV receivers were never able to receive, at any one site, more than two of the five DTV stations currently

broadcasting. In most cases, the second station's reception was intermittent, when available. At one downtown location, the DTV sets were not able to receive any pictures. In contrast, side-by-side tests were conducted using a two-inch Sony Watchman that easily received nine UHF analog TV stations at all test locations. "It is sobering that a Watchman costing less than one hundred dollars outperformed DTV sets costing several thousands of dollars," noted Hyman. "While DTV sets can yield startling pictures, the trick is in receiving the signal and the latest generation sets fail to accomplish that."

Hyman also reported that Sinclair will conduct DTV tests and demonstrations for members of Congress and other governmental officials in Washington, D.C. during the next 60 days. He stated that Congressional leaders have reported their commitment to free broadcast television and the failure of over-the-air DTV reception has heightened concerns in a number of Congressional offices.

"The ongoing tests have underscored the critical nature of over-the-air reception for free television," said David Smith, President of Sinclair. Smith further noted that the broadcast industry has lost audience share to multi-channel, subscription-based competitors. "We are not afraid to compete, but we do not want to be disadvantaged by a technical failure of the DTV standard that relegates our industry to cable and satellite carriage if we are to be watched. It is time the Federal Communications Commission place on public notice for comment the petition that recommends augmenting the DTV standard with a secondary transmission system that is virtually immune to the problems plaguing current DTV receivers."

Sinclair Broadcast Group, Inc. is a diversified broadcasting company that currently owns or programs 58 television stations in 38 markets and 6 radio stations in one market. Sinclair's television group reaches approximately 24.4% of U.S. television households and includes ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC, WB, and UPN affiliates.

SOURCE Sinclair Broadcast Group, Inc.

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