



**NO MORE MONKEYS** Heather Shorr's cable company moved Animal Planet onto a digital-only tier.

## Confused about cable?

**S**HOULD THEY SIT DOWN now to watch the Animal Planet channel, Heather Shorr and her daughters would no longer see snow leopards—just snow. Shorr, a Connecticut homemaker, says their cable provider has moved the channel onto a digital tier. She'd have to rent a set-top box for each TV set. The cable company is scrambling some stations, and the TVs can't descramble them on their own.

### What Consumers Union is doing

We've been getting complaints from across the country as cable providers shift channels to the digital-only realm. It seems that cable companies are using confusion about the forthcoming digital TV transition—which applies only to TVs with antennas, not to TVs with cable—as a chance to boost the bills of cable customers.

The cable companies say the changes are needed to free up bandwidth, but we believe that when consumers pay more for the same channels, it's a rate hike. Customers must rent a digital cable box for each TV set to see channels that used to be available without one. At up to \$10 per box per month, the increase isn't minor.

Since 2005, when Congress mandated a switch to all-digital broadcasts as of Feb-

ruary 2009, it's been clear that millions of households with TVs that receive news and information through an antenna will have to upgrade their equipment. Consumers Union has long insisted that customers not bear the cost of the transition, and we're pleased that government funding offsets at least some of the expense.

Meanwhile, the cable industry has been assuring cable customers that they won't be affected by the transition. Apparently that's not the case.

The timing of the industry's rate hike is deceptive. The government must push cable providers to treat subscribers fairly. We support proposals like that of Sen. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., who wants the cable provider in his state to cut rates when it cuts channels and to offer free installation of set-top boxes for those who now need them to watch channels they used to receive.

### What you can do

**Talk to your cable company about free installation and a lower monthly fee for a set-top box. There's evidence that providers are negotiating.**

**If the cable company says the channel changes are due to the DTV conversion mandated by the feds, notify your state's attorney general. They're not.**