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County leaders told how to cut phone bill \$80k

By KAREN NELSON

PASCAGOULA – Jackson County supervisors learned Monday basic ways to save \$80,000 a year on the county phone bill.

RMH Telecom Consultants' Robert Hardy told the board that by taking advantage of a state contract with the company that provides telephone service to the county, Jackson County could realize \$69,000 a year in savings.

It would be a matter of shifting billing through the state, he said. It's something the state is doing for other entities like school districts and the city of Hattiesburg.

He added other, smaller savings, to that one.

In addition to those savings, Hardy said his company found data circuits that Jackson County was begin billed for even though it had terminated them after Katrina. He said the lines had been moved on an emergency basis after the storm.

Hardy said straightening that out constituted a \$17,000-a-year savings, and the county could pursue a refund for the lines back to 2005.

The county pays about \$400,000 a year to provide telephones and information lines to county offices.

Hardy and his firm recommended the county update its 30-year-old telephone system and realize even further savings. But that option would require a capital outlay. He could not say how much an upgrade would cost, because it would vary based on whether the county bought or rented the equipment.

But he said an update would reduce the 640 lines the county is paying for by 20 to one.

County supervisors hired Hardy's firm for \$15,000.

When he presented his findings, Hardy said, "The county can save good money with no risk, today."

An upgraded system would allow county supervisors and departments to forward calls to their cell phones, have voice-mails routed to their computers and join in remote meetings.

Hardy also told the county it might save up to 25 percent if it took bids for a contractor to provide its cell phone service.