

Lightning bolt damages courthouse computers

BY: ERIC MANN

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Adams County suffered an estimated loss of \$20,000 in computer equipment over the Memorial Day weekend when a bolt of lightning struck at or near the courthouse in downtown Decatur.

The county commissioners were apprised of that occurrence on Monday by County Information Systems Manager Pat Norton, who said this is at least the third time in recent years that lightning has caused damage to county equipment in the courthouse.

However, reported Norton, because the county's data-storage system was shifted to the Adams County Service Complex, a block away from the courthouse, after a previous lightning strike, no data were lost this time, unlike in previous years.

The damage occurred to personal computers and a file server, said Norton, who added that the courthouse is an excellent target for lightning because of its size, a bell tower that adds height, and a number of large metal beams just below the roof that act almost like a magnet for lightning.

More technology reports Norton gave the commissioners included the following matters:

* He said the Indiana Board of Accounts, after years of resisting the movement to "paperless offices" through greater use of computers, has changed its opinion and will now allow such things as payroll transfers electronically instead of on paper or in books of written records.

Norton says he is all for such a change, telling the commissioners, "I think we're ready for that next level."

* After Commissioner Doug Bauman asked Norton to give him a report of Norton's top 10 priorities, the information systems specialist said he would do so as soon as he can.

* Norton revealed that he plans to have four or five people who are knowledgeable in computers working part-time this summer on county tax data and the task of renumbering the 19,000 parcels of land in the county.

When asked by the commissioners if those workers could help County Assessor Judy Affolder get her work done more quickly, including reassessment chores, Norton said that is likely correct.

He went on to say that, even though the part-time workers understand computers, they could perform jobs for assessor without being required to understand the program with which they are working, since their job would only be inserting numbers in the system in a certain way, not using the numbers after they are placed into the system.

As Norton put it, "It's more about accuracy, not understanding how it works."