

Web site will help you pick a phone plan

By *TONY REID - H&R Staff Writer*

DECATUR - Consumers lost in the jungle of cell phone calling plans now have a potential shortcut to savings: www.CUBCellphoneSaver.com.

This is a new free service from the Citizens Utility Board consumer watchdog group, which spends its time trying to get families better deals on telephone, electric and natural gas service.

For years, the board has offered phone clinics to help consumers troubleshoot their telephone landline bills and cut unnecessary fees, but the

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growing army of customers who rely on cell phones couldn't get the same help, until now.

"Our job is to fight for cheaper telephone, electric and natural gas rates, and the CUB Cell Phone Saver is another weapon in our arsenal," said David Kolata, the board's executive director. "We are thrilled to offer such a groundbreaking service."

Launched at the end of July, the service works like this: Customers go online to www.CUBCellphoneSaver.com and follow the onscreen directions. The system is compatible with the five biggest wireless companies - AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, U.S. Cellular and Verizon - and you will need to upload an online copy of your bill for the Cell Phone Saver software to analyze.

If you are not signed up for online service, step-by-step instructions on the utility board site will enable you to do this. Once it has the information, the system is fast.

"My experience has been that it will give you an answer within seconds," said Jim Chilsen, a CUB spokesman. "No longer than a minute."

Chilsen said the strength of the system is that it can number crunch all the various plan options offered by your carrier, so you can switch plans without switching carriers and incurring penalties. An "e-mail my carrier" button then enables consumers to send their wireless company a message requesting specific money-saving changes based on the Cell Phone Saver analysis.

Decatur cell phone user Dianne Spaniol plans to give Cell Phone Saver a whirl. "It sounds like it would be great," she said. Her family switched to exclusive cell phone use hoping it would save money after they decided there didn't seem any point having a landline anymore.

"But, in the end, we aren't actually saving any money," she said. "And maybe that's because we've got the wrong plan."

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