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Taking Maximum Advantage of Your EPIRB

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A little-known option included in 406 EPIRB (emergency position indicating radio beacon) registration forms could be a lifesaver. By updating the "Additional Data" section online with trip-specific dates and other information, rescuers will be able to respond more quickly and more appropriately to emergencies at sea.

Charlie Bond, a safety consultant and educator with Ralston Cunningham Associates in the Seattle area, says he's been filing these "trip plans" for both EPIRBs and PLBs (personal locator beacons) for years. "They greatly enhance rescues," he says. "The key information is the dates. I've learned by talking with the rescue coordination center watchstanders that if the dates on the EPIRB registration forms aren't current, or if it's undated, they tend to ignore the alert until they get a confirmation."

But if the "additional data" says the boat is, for example, en route from Seattle to Ketchikan between May 1 and May 4, and the alert arrives May 3, it will be responded to immediately.

For workboat operators, the trip plans could be filed by a company's safety officer or dispatcher. In addition to voyage dates and locations, the trip plans can include crew information, including number on board and any known medical conditions, such as insulin-dependent diabetics.

"The advantage for a company is that the information is instantaneous," says Bond. "A dispatcher may have this information, but it might take 15 to 20 minutes to look it up and respond to the rescue coordinators. If the registration information is current and updated with a trip plan, rescuers will be able to start responding within three to four minutes after the beacon is activated."

EPIRB registration can be updated online at:

www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov.

Bond says it takes less than five minutes to file a trip plan in the Additional Data section.

Upon registration, a label for your EPIRB is provided by NOAA such as the sample shown below.



When an EPIRB is activated, a radio signal is transmitted, picked up by a SAR satellite, sent to a ground receiving station, on to a control center, and then to a Rescue Coordination Center as shown in the picture below. The RCC verifies the source of the signal and then can dispatch resources to the scene.



U.S. Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Examiners are a team of safety oriented individuals trained and ready to help you understand safety regulations and practices. They are prepared to discuss in depth survival equipment and its proper installation and maintenance, watertight integrity and stability. Mobile damage control and stability trainers are available for on-site training.

www.FishSafe.info

