



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security and Stewardship

July 13, 2009
Washington, DC

Alert 04-09

EPIRB and PLB REGISTRATION

This Safety Alert addresses the importance of ensuring your Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) and Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) are properly registered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

One of the circumstances surrounding a recent major marine casualty involving an uninspected commercial fishing vessel was the improper registration of the vessel's EPIRB. The Unique Identification Number (UIN) entered into NOAA's registration database was different from the actual UIN programmed into the EPIRB by the manufacturer and transmitted to the Search and Rescue Satellite System after the vessel sank. The improper registration of this vessel's EPIRB delayed the notification to Search and Rescue personnel, and subsequently delayed the launching of rescue assets.

The Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking (SARSAT) System is composed of stationary and orbiting satellites. For any given location (outside of the Polar Regions), there is continuous coverage by a stationary satellite, and coverage by an orbiting satellite every 60 to 75 minutes on average (which includes the Polar Regions). The stationary satellites can receive all of the information transmitted by an EPIRB or PLB, but they are not capable of determining the position of the beacon unless the beacon has an optional GPS receiver (not all models carry this option). Normally, position identification is accomplished by the orbiting satellites. So, if a beacon is not equipped with the optional GPS, it could take up to 100 minutes for the orbiting satellites to identify the location of the beacon.

In the case of this casualty, the first notification was received by a stationary satellite soon after the vessel sank, but the orbiting satellites were not within range and the improper registration prevented the identification of the vessel's name, homeport and emergency contact information from being forwarded to the Search and Rescue authorities.

As a result of this incident NOAA has commenced an important safety initiative, emailing and mailing all owners/operators of EPIRBs and PLBs registered in the U.S. National Beacon Registration Database, and requesting that they follow the steps listed below. The U.S. Coast Guard supports this initiative, and **strongly recommends** all vessel owners and operators:

1. Confirm that current EPIRB and PLB registrations are correct. Cross-check that the UIN printed by the manufacturer on your EPIRB or PLB matches the UIN printed on the proof-of-registration decal sent to you by NOAA. The manufacturer-provided UIN is usually found on the exterior of the beacon, although in some cases the UIN is printed inside the beacon, under the beacon's battery. You can also cross-check that the above UINs match the NOAA registration database by visiting the National Beacon Registration website at: www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov and choosing one of the links for your existing beacon registration.

If any of the numbers or letters in the UINs are different, your beacon may not be registered properly and you should contact NOAA immediately at: (301) 817-4515 or 1-888-212-SAVE (7283).

2. Update EPIRB and PLB registrations if there are any changes to the vessel information, owner/operator information, emergency contact information, or if your registration information has expired. Registration data must be renewed every two years. Updates and renewals can be made using the same registration methods listed below.
3. Register new or previously unregistered EPIRBs and PLBs with NOAA via the internet at: www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov. *Note: Registration is mandatory and is required by Federal Regulation.*

Alternatively, you can mail the registration form which can be found in the beacon's packaging, or downloaded from the beacon registration website provided above, to the following address:

Beacon Registration
NOAA/NESDIS,
NSOF, E/SP3
4231 Suitland Road
Suitland, MD 20746

The registration form can also be faxed to: (301) 817-4565.

If you have already received a registration safety notification from NOAA and responded accordingly, no further action is required until your next beacon renewal or update.

This safety alert is provided for informational purposes only and does not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational or material requirement. Developed by the Office of Design and Engineering Standards, United States Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC and the NOAA Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking (SARSAT) Program Office, Suitland, MD.

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