



# MARINE INFORMATION BULLETIN

## Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons

### 121.5 MHz EPIRB – Phase out

#### PURPOSE

- This bulletin has been raised to bring to your attention the need to replace your 121.5 MHz analogue distress beacons with 406 MHz digital distress beacons before 1 November 2008.
- The search and rescue service for 406 MHz distress beacons will continue to operate up to and after the phase out of the 121.5 MHz service.

#### BACKGROUND

- The international council that controls the satellite system, Cospas-Sarsat, is phasing out processing of 121.5 MHz analogue signals from distress beacons.
- The 406 MHz digital system will provide a search capability that is more reliable, more accurate and has a better response time than the 121.5 MHz analogue system.
- Reasons for closing the 121.5 MHz service include reducing the chronically high false alarm rate from distress beacons. Currently 97 % of 121.5 MHz analogue distress beacon signals are false alarms.
- In Queensland vessels required to carry EPIRBs must be equipped with 406 MHz units before 1 November 2008.
- An EPIRB must be registered with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) by the owner or master of the ship on which the EPIRB is to be operated.

#### EPIRBs

- Satellite beacons provide for search and rescue of persons requiring assistance in emergency situations. When activated, beacons transmit a signal to the Cospas-Sarsat global search and rescue satellite system which processes the information to obtain a position. In our region this information is relayed to the Rescue Coordination Centre, RCC Australia, operated by AMSA, in Canberra.
- It is mandatory to register 406 MHz beacons with AMSA and to have confirmation of registration. This registration provides the RCC with information about your boat. A distress

signal from a 406 MHz unit will provide information to identify registered users. Contact details are part of registration and a simple phone call can determine if there is a genuine emergency or not.

- In Queensland all marine craft operating beyond partially smooth waters and 2 nautical miles or more from land must be equipped with an EPIRB. A 406 MHz EPIRB must comply with AS/NZS 4280.1: 2003.
- To avoid high demand close to the closure of the 121.5 MHz service commercial operators and recreational boaters are encouraged to purchase and register a 406 MHz EPIRB well before the commencement of the legislative requirement on 1 November 2008.
- Responsible disposal of 121.5 MHz units is necessary, not only because of the chemicals in the batteries but also to avoid causing false alarms. The national retailer **Battery World** is providing a free disposal service.
- Further information about EPIRBs, can be found on the AMSA website at <http://beacons.amsa.gov.au>. This site contains important information about distress beacons and changes to the distress beacon system. The site also contains information on caring for and maintaining your beacon, testing your beacon, a simple to understand description of the search and rescue satellite system and important information on the use of EPIRBs.

## Contact information

AMSAs help line for 406 MHz distress beacon queries and registration is 1800 406 406.

If you require further information about this Marine Information Bulletin, please contact 07 3120 7341 or [msgmail@msg.qld.gov.au](mailto:msgmail@msg.qld.gov.au).

Other Marine Information Bulletins covering various topics relating to the safe operation of ships may be obtained from Maritime Safety Queensland's website at [www.msg.qld.gov.au](http://www.msg.qld.gov.au) and from the following Marine Operations Centres.

Airlie Beach	(07) 4946 2200	Mooloolaba	(07) 5477 8425
Bundaberg	(07) 4131 8500	Pinkenba	(07) 3860 3500
Cairns	(07) 4052 7400	Southport	(07) 5539 7300
Gladstone	(07) 4973 1200	Townsville	(07) 4726 3400
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