

Boating Articles

121.5/243 MHz EPIRBs Discontinued

BOATERS MUST NOT OPERATE 121.5/243 MHz EPIRBs AFTER 31 DECEMBER 2006

WASHINGTON - The Coast Guard reminds all boaters that beginning January 1, 2007, both 121.5 and 243 MHz Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs) are prohibited from use in both commercial and recreational watercraft. Boaters wishing to have an emergency rescue beacon aboard their vessel must have a digital 406 MHz model.

The January 1, 2007, date to stop using 121.5 MHz EPIRBs is in preparation for February 1, 2009, when satellite processing of distress signals from all 121.5/243 MHz beacons will terminate. Following this termination date, only the 406 MHz beacons will be detected by the International Cospas-Sarsat Satellite System which provides distress alert and location data for search and rescue operations around the world.

The regulation applies to all Class A, B, and S 121.5/243 MHz EPIRBs. It does not affect 121.5/243 MHz man overboard devices which are designed to work directly with a base alerting unit only and not with the satellite system.

This change, in large part, was brought about by the unreliability of the 121.5/243 MHz beacons in an emergency situation. Data reveals that with a 121.5 MHz beacon, only one alert out of every 50 is a genuine distress situation. This has a significant effect on expending the limited resources of search and rescue personnel and platforms. With 406 MHz beacons, false alerts have been reduced significantly, and, when properly registered, can usually be resolved with a telephone call to the beacon owner. Consequently, real alerts can receive the attention they deserve.

When a 406 MHz beacon signal is received, search and rescue personnel can retrieve information from a registration database. This includes the beacon owner's contact information, emergency contact information, and vessel/aircraft identifying characteristics. Having this information allows the Coast Guard, or other rescue personnel, to respond appropriately.

In the U.S., users are required by law to directly register their beacon in the U.S. 406 MHz Beacon Registration Database at:

<http://www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov/>

or by calling 1-888-212-SAVE. Other users can register their beacon in their country's national beacon registration database or, if no national database is available, in the International Beacon Registration Database at

<https://www.406registration.com/>.

The United States Coast Guard is the lead agency for coordinating national

maritime search and rescue policy and is responsible for providing search and rescue services on, under and over assigned international waters and waters subject to United States jurisdiction.

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The U.S. Coast Guard is a military, maritime, multi-mission service within the Department of Homeland Security dedicated to protecting the safety and security of America.