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121.5 MHz SATELLITE DISTRESS ALERTING ENDS IN 2009

*Public Affairs Detachment
San Diego, Calif.*
U.S. Coast Guard

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Contact: PADET San Diego,
CA
(619) 278-7022, phone
(619) 247-5064, mobile

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SAN DIEGO -- The Coast Guard is reminding boaters to check their boating equipment, because after Feb. 1, 2009, only distress alerts from 406 MHz beacons will continue to be detected and processed by search and rescue satellites worldwide. Older model EPIRBs (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons) that transmit a distress alert on 121.5 MHz or 243 MHz will no longer be monitored by satellite, and is likely to go completely undetected in an emergency. Mariners disposing of their old EPIRB before Feb. 1, 2009 are urged to first remove the battery.

Although recreational boaters are not required to carry an EPIRB, they are strongly recommended for ALL boaters venturing outside the harbor, along with a VHF-FM marine band radio. The 406 MHz signal sent by the newer EPIRBs when a mariner encounters distress are picked up by the COSPAS/SARSAT satellite constellation, which determines the EPIRBs position through triangulation. EPIRBs with embedded GPS are even more helpful in quickly finding a distressed boater. With GPS coordinates, the position of distress is pinpointed almost immediately. Without GPS, it may take two or three satellite passes to come up with a good, triangulated position.



"As we say in the Coast Guard, 406 EPIRBs take the 'search' out of 'search and rescue,'"

said Capt. Chip Strangfeld, Commander of Coast Guard Sector San Diego. "In some cases, the time saved by EPIRBs could mean the difference between life and death. For a one-time cost of under \$900, a GPS imbedded 406 EPIRB is 'cheap insurance' for those who put themselves at risk in the offshore environment."

As long as the new 406 MHz beacon has been registered (which is required by law), search and rescue authorities can quickly confirm that the distress is real, who they are looking for, and a description of the vessel or aircraft. This means an effective search can be initiated even before a final distress location has been determined for non-GPS EPIRBs. It also means that a false activation may be resolved with a phone call to the beacon owner, saving resources for actual distresses.

This registration is free and can be done on the internet at: www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov or it can be mailed/faxed to NOAA by calling 1-888-212-SAVE. Beacon registrations must be updated at least every two years or when information such as emergency contact phone numbers and other vital information changes. This registration information is only available to authorized search and rescue personnel. It saves lives.

More potentially life-saving information along with how to take a boating safety course or get a free vessel safety check from the Coast Guard Auxiliary can be found on the internet at: www.uscgboating.org.

-Coast Guard-
Saving lives since 1790