



Maritime and Coastguard Agency

MARINE GUIDANCE NOTE

MGN 361 (M+F)

GMDSS: Termination of the 121.5 / 243MHz Initial Emergency Alerting Service

Notice to all Shipowners, Masters, Operators, Fishermen, Small craft operators and Leisure vessel users.

This notice should be read with MSN 1816.

PLEASE NOTE:-

Where this document provides guidance on the law it should not be regarded as definitive. The way the law applies to any particular case can vary according to circumstances - for example, from vessel to vessel and you should consider seeking independent legal advice if you are unsure of your own legal position.

Summary

- The processing of the satellite Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) 121.5 / 243MHz frequency in the GMDSS will cease on 1 February 2009.
- Such beacons should not be used as an Initial Emergency Alerting device.
- Unwanted beacons should be disposed of safely.

1. Introduction

1.1 COSPAS-SARSAT is a joint international satellite-aided Search and Rescue (SAR) system. Over 40 countries and organisations contribute to the operation and management of the system.

1.2 At its 37th session in October 2006, the COSPAS-SARSAT Council reaffirmed its earlier decision (in conjunction with IMO & ICAO) taken at the 25th General Session (October 2000), that satellite processing of 121.5/243MHz transmissions would terminate on 1 February 2009.

1.3 From 1 February 2009, only 406MHz beacons will be processed within the COSPAS-SARSAT system. This affects all maritime beacons (EPIRBs), all aviation emergency locator transponders (ELTs) and all personal locator beacons (PLBs) operating on the 121.5/243MHz bands. Users should start taking steps to ensure they have an Initial Emergency Alerting Facility alternative. Suitable replacement would be the 406MHz beacon system.

2. Termination of 121.5 / 243MHz Initial Emergency Alerting facility in the GMDSS

2.1 121.5 / 243MHz beacons should not be used as an Initial Emergency Alerting device after 1 February 2009.

2.2 The primary method for electronic Initial Emergency Alerting will now be the 406MHz beacon system.

2.3 A 121.5 / 243MHz beacon may still be used as a homing device for suitably equipped SAR services, once an alert by other means has identified the vessel's approximate position.

3. **Disposal of unwanted 121.5 / 243MHz beacons**

3.1 The beacons in use are fitted with a Lithium battery. Batteries should be removed from unwanted beacons so that they can be disposed of in the correct manner, thus avoiding accidental activation; this can be carried out in various ways. The MCA encourages the following methods of disposal that comply with the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive, Article 2.1:

- Disposal at a **Local Authority Designated Collection Facility (DCF)**.
Local authority waste disposal sites where batteries and electrical goods waste can be disposed of for recycling.
- Disposal through a **Distributor Take Back Scheme (DTBS)**.
Some manufacturers are offering incentives to take back the 121.5 / 243MHz beacon and trade-in for a 406MHz variant.

More Information

Navigation Safety Branch
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Bay 2/29
Spring Place
105 Commercial Road
Southampton
SO15 1EG

Tel : +44 (0) 23 8032 9356
Fax : +44 (0) 23 8032 9204
e-mail: navigationsafety@mcga.gov.uk

General Inquiries: 24 Hour Infoline
infoline@mcga.gov.uk

MCA Website Address: www.mcga.gov.uk

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