

Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon Changes

EPIRB's have been serving recreational boatowners and commercial craft in Australian waters now for many years. They have proven themselves time and time again as a genuinely practical life saving device.

Originally designed in the 1970's to operate on a frequency of 121.5MHz, they have become relatively cheap, easy to maintain and apart from the vital battery needing to be replaced every 3-5 years (on average), EPIRB's have provided Australian boatowners with a great deal of comfort and saved countless lives since they were slowly introduced some 30 years ago.

The frequency 121.5MHz was chosen because at that time (back in the 1970's, remember) this was one of the international distress frequencies and because satellites were relatively scarce back then, the authorities opted to use a frequency that was monitored by aircraft all around the world.

This has been quite effective and until the last decade or so, the

only really effective choice for this particular task ie, to click a little switch on a small box and activate a signal that could be picked up by a passing aircraft, and in more recent times, by the Cospas-Sarsat satellite system.

Left: One of the biggest advantages of the new 406 MHz EPIRBs is that they are each **individually registered** with AMSA in Canberra on a **national database of EPIRBs**. This contains the full particulars about the boat, the owner/crew, how they can be contacted 24/7 on land or on the boat - thus giving the AMSA staff a full deck of cards about you and I to work with, as soon as the 'balloon goes up'. As far as getting help quickly is concerned, there is no better way.



Key Points About The New EPIRBs

- Existing 121.5 MHz EPIRBs okay until **July 1, 2008**
- The new 406 MHz digital beacons are already working
- The 406 MHz EPIRBs broadcast an individual 'signature' so the authorities can tell it is **YOU** in trouble
- The existing 121.5 Epirbs can pinpoint SAR operations to within 20 kilometres; the new 406 beacons get into 5 kilometres - and with a GPS fitted EPIRB, the distress position can be accurate down to 100 metres.
- The basic auto-activated 406MHz EPIRB required by law will set you back around \$600-\$700.
- A 406MHz EPIRB with an integral GPS will cost from around \$1900 (and up!) but the GPS is **NOT** mandatory, just a **VERY** good idea if you are heading wide offshore.
- By law in every state, ANY boat going more than 2 miles offshore must be fitted with an EPIRB.
- Don't confuse a "PLB" (a 'Personal Locator Beacon') you can carry in your pocket, or wear on a lifejacket, with a marine EPIRB (as shown here) which, first and foremost, are designed to **FLOAT UPRIGHT** in the water.

