



## **Safety Thursday**

**May 2, 2003**

### **EPIRBs and PLBs**

One of the most important rescue devices available to sailors today is the GPS-enabled satellite locator beacon. It can take the 'search' out of search and rescue. If you ever need help from the USCG, the EPIRB/PLB is your best friend.

EPIRBs and PLBs are locator beacon devices that, when activated in an emergency situation, will report your position to authorities to help increase the chances of a successful rescue of you and your crew. The MSRs require at least one per boat:

*57. EPIRBs – Any EPIRB that is required to be carried per these MSR shall be a 406 MHz EPIRB that is either:*

- 1. connected to a continuously functioning external GPS or,*
- 2. fitted with an internal GPS.*

*Further, the EPIRB shall be properly registered with the appropriate authority and should be tested in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions when first commissioned and then at least annually. A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB), meeting the above criteria, shall satisfy the EPIRB requirement above.*

*For the Chicago Yacht Club Race to Mackinac - EPIRBs are required to be carried by all boats.*

An EPIRB or PLB (with GPS) can, with one push of a button, send your location and identity to rescue forces along with a distress call, from almost anywhere in the world.

EPIRBs are designed to be mounted to your boat, whereas PLBs are worn by a person. For our race you can use either a GPS-enabled EPIRB or PLB (or both) to satisfy the requirement. There are many differences between EPIRBs and PLBs, but the fundamental ones come down to size, battery life, durability and inherent buoyancy. EPIRBs are registered to the boat, while PLBs are registered to an individual. A good rundown of emergency beacons is available at

<http://www.sarsat.noaa.gov/emercns.html>

Take the time to read it and to understand how these devices can be used to signal for help in a Mayday situation. Every crew member of the boat should be familiar with the location of and operation of the EPIRB/PLB, as there is no way to tell who will be required to operate it in an emergency.

No matter which device you choose, it is imperative that you register it with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration:

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

Without registration, the beacon is essentially useless. Registration allows the Search and Rescue (SAR) authorities to identify whose beacon is going off, helping them deploy appropriate resources and avoid false alarms by contacting emergency contacts. The Rambler 100 incident in the Fastnet race shows how important proper registration is. Despite PLBs being activated, SAR forces were delayed in their response because the beacons were not properly registered. See the report at <http://about.ussailing.org/AssetFactory.aspx?vid=16967>

Beacon registration is valid for two years, however; it is important that you update it whenever there is a change in your information. If you are using a PLB, we strongly recommend that you list your boat's information when prompted to complete the "Additional Data" section during the registration process. Any identifying information would be helpful – boat name, sail number, color of hull and sails, and anything else SAR authorities can use to help identify your boat.

An important point: not all PLBs float! So when purchasing or renting one, make sure that yours does.

On the Great Lakes, a functioning and properly-registered EPIRB/PBL, paired with a radio with DSC distress signaling, will greatly enhance the likelihood of search and rescue forces finding you. This enables them to focus on the rescue and not on the search.

As always, if you have any questions, please contact our Race Coordinator at [racecoordinator@chicagoyachtclub.org](mailto:racecoordinator@chicagoyachtclub.org)

*Note: The purpose of this article is to highlight some of the Mac Safety Regulations and how your crew can race the Mac as safely as possible. As always, ultimate responsibility for the safety of the crew and the decision whether to race or to stop racing is that of the skipper (RRS4, MSR2). This email is meant as a courtesy only and you should always refer to the Race Documents section of the website for the Notice of Race, Sailing Instructions and Mac Safety Regulations, which govern the race.*

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