



PUBLIC NOTICE

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WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU REMINDS AVIATORS AND MARINERS THAT SATELLITE MONITORING OF 121.5 MHz ALERTS WILL END FEBRUARY 1, 2009

The Wireless Telecommunications Bureau reminds users of emergency locator transmitters used on aircraft (ELTs), and emergency position-indicating radio beacons used on ships (EPIRBs), that such beacons operating on frequency 121.5 MHz will no longer be “heard” by search and rescue satellites as of February 1, 2009. This change results from decision by the international organization overseeing the satellite-based search and rescue system - COSPAS/SARSAT¹ - that it will terminate satellite processing of distress signals from 121.5 MHz ELTs and EPIRBs as of that date. Consequently, users of ELTs and EPIRBs that send distress alerts on 121.5 MHz therefore must switch to beacons that operate at 406.0-406.1 MHz (406 MHz) if the alerts are to be detected and relayed via satellite.

COSPAS-SARSAT is an international program established by Canada, France, Russia, and the United States to operate a satellite-based search and rescue system. The COSPAS-SARSAT satellite system uses satellites in low-earth and geostationary orbits to detect and locate aviators, mariners, and land-based users in distress by tracking distress alerts on 121.5 MHz and 406 MHz. In 2000, COSPAS/SARSAT announced plans to terminate satellite processing of distress signals from 121.5 MHz emergency beacons on February 1, 2009, and urged users to switch to 406 MHz beacons. The Commission has prohibited the use of 121.5 MHz EPIRBs on U.S.-registered vessels,² and is considering a proposal³ to prohibit the use of 121.5 MHz ELTs on U.S.-registered aircraft.⁴ In addition, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (www.sarsat.noaa.gov), the U.S. Coast Guard (<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg534/>), the U.S. Air Force (<http://www.1af.acc.af.mil/units/afrc/>), and the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (<http://searchandrescue.gsfc.nasa.gov/>), which administer the COSPAS/SARSAT system in the United States, advise users of 121.5 MHz emergency beacons to switch to 406 MHz beacons.

¹ See www.cospas-sarsat.org.

² See Amendment of Parts 13 and 80 of the Commission’s Rules Concerning Maritime Communications, *Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making*, WT Docket No. 00-48, 17 FCC Rcd 6741, 6761-62 ¶ 47 (2002).

³ See Review of Part 87 of the Commission’s Rules Concerning the Aviation Radio Service, *Second Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making*, WT Docket No. 01-289, 21 FCC Rcd 11582, 11608-09 ¶ 43 (2006).

⁴ Aircraft that travel to Canada or Mexico must also be aware of those countries’ requirements. Canada has proposed to require any aircraft entering its airspace after February 1, 2009 to have a 406 MHz ELT installed on board. As of July 1, 2008 all aircraft flying to Mexico must have a 406 MHz ELT although Mexico has agreed to allow U.S.-registered aircraft to continue using existing 121.5 MHz ELTs until July 1, 2009 or when the battery on the existing 121.5 MHz ELT is due to be replaced, whichever occurs first.

When disposing of an obsolete 121.5 MHz beacon, users must disable the beacon to prevent false alerts by removing the batteries, which should be recycled or disposed of pursuant to local regulations.

The termination of satellite processing of 121.5 MHz signals does not mean the end of the use of the frequency. Devices other than ELTs and EPIRBs (such as man-overboard systems and homing transmitters) that operate on 121.5 MHz and do not rely on satellite detection will not be affected by the phase-out. Nor will personal locator beacons (PLBs), which operate only on 406 MHz.

For further information, consult the websites noted above or contact Mr. Jim Shaffer, Mobility Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, at (202) 418-0687, TTY (202) 414-1255, email James.Shaffer@fcc.gov.

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