

## Marine Information Bulletin

### Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons – frequently asked questions

Issued July 2014

#### Background

An Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) is a small electronic device that can help Search and Rescue authorities find people in distress when it is activated in a life threatening situation.

EPIRBs are designed to work for a minimum of 48 hours continuously once activated. Search and Rescue authorities respond to all EPIRB activations. You must tell them immediately if you do not need help anymore.

All boats and PWCs operating beyond smooth and partially smooth waters must carry a 406MHz digital EPIRB when more than 2 nautical miles from land.

EPIRBs must:

- comply with the Australian Standards (4280.1:2003)
- be registered with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). Registration is free and must be renewed every two years. You need to tell AMSA when the EPIRB ownership or boat details change.
- have a registration sticker from AMSA on the beacon as proof of current registration.

#### Frequently asked questions

**Q.** What is the HexID or UIN?

**A.** The HexID or Unique Identity Number (UIN) is the unique code programmed into each 406MHz EPIRB and transmitted when the beacon is activated. This code must be included on the EPIRB's registration form as it is the only code that links the individual EPIRB to the registration database. Without the HexID the beacon cannot be registered. The HexID is 15 characters long and is made up of hexadecimal numbers (0-9) and letters (A-F). The code can be found on the label of all 406MHz EPIRBs.

**Q.** When should I use an EPIRB?

**A.** You should only use an EPIRB when there is a threat of grave and imminent danger. During an emergency, you should first try to communicate with others close by using radios, phones and other signalling devices. Mobile phones can be used but should not be relied on as they can be out of range, have low batteries or become water-damaged.

**Q.** Where should I stow my EPIRB?

- A.** In a boat, an EPIRB should be stowed either in:
- its mounting bracket where it is visible and easy to access in an emergency
  - a grab bag along with flares, a torch or strobe and other safety equipment.

If possible, keep it out of the weather and locked away when you are not using your boat. If you keep your EPIRB in a grab bag or out of its bracket you should use a manually operated EPIRB. Water activated EPIRBs should always be stowed in their brackets correctly.

**Q.** What should I do if my EPIRB is sold, lost, stolen or destroyed?

**A.** You should tell AMSA if you sell your distress beacon or it is lost, stolen or destroyed. If AMSA is not told and the new owner activates the beacon, the rescue will be delayed as the last known registered owner will be contacted. You can tell AMSA about sold, lost, stolen or destroyed distress beacons online at [beacons.amsa.gov.au](http://beacons.amsa.gov.au) or by fax, phone, post or email.

**Q.** What if an EPIRB is accidentally activated?

**A.** The most important thing to do is switch off the beacon and notify the Rescue Coordination Centre Australia as soon as possible by calling 1800 641 792 so that a search and rescue operation does not start. There is no penalty for accidental activations.

**Q.** When should I replace my EPIRB batteries?

**A.** EPIRB batteries need to be replaced before the expiry date noted on the label of the beacon. This is so the beacon can transmit for the minimum time required once activated. Battery life varies from model to model. Batteries should be replaced by the manufacturer or their Australian agent.

**Q. How should unwanted EPIRBs be disposed of?**

**A.** EPIRBs need to be disposed of responsibly in case they accidentally activate and trigger a false alarm. Unwanted EPIRBs can be disposed of in the collection bins at any of the [Battery World stores](#) around Australia. Do not dispose of old EPIRBs in general waste as it will end up in landfill and could be accidentally turned on.

[More information about EPIRBs and distress beacons](#) can be found on the Australian Maritime Safety Authority website.

### **Further information**

For further information contact your local Maritime Safety Queensland office:

Airlie Beach	4841 4500
Bundaberg	4132 6600
Cairns	4052 7400
Gladstone	4971 5200
Hervey Bay	4194 9600
Mackay	4944 3700
Mooloolaba	5452 1825
Brisbane	3632 7500
Gold Coast	5585 1810
Townsville	4421 8100

Other Marine Information Bulletins about the safe operation of ships are on Maritime Safety Queensland's website [www.msq.qld.gov.au](http://www.msq.qld.gov.au).