



NOAA FISHERIES

National Observer Program Advisory Team's Safety Advisory Committee

The Safety Advisory Committee (SAC) advises the National Observer Program Advisory Team (NOPAT) on matters of observer safety, health, and welfare. It works to promote a safer and healthier environment for observers to work in and is responsible for developing and recommending the requirements necessary to fulfill NOPAT's national safety standards, including:

- Spearheading and reviewing proposals on observer safety initiatives, along with monitoring and advising on any safety policies and programs which may affect NOAA Fisheries observers.
- Addressing specific safety issues through seminars, workshops, forums, and panel discussions.
- Developing training classes and standards for observer programs' safety trainers.
- Creating and maintaining enforcement mechanisms to enforce safety-related policies for observer programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/fishery-observers

Observer Know-How: Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacons and Personal Locator Beacons

Safety Equals Successful Monitoring

We depend on our observers and at-sea monitors—professionally trained data collectors who gather crucial information about many U.S. commercial fisheries—to be our eyes and ears on the water. The work of observers is critical to effective fisheries management, and their safety on the job is of utmost importance. The marine environment can entail unexpected and challenging situations—but practicing safety skills and preparing for those potential challenges can help improve safety.

Survival at Sea: Key Emergency Signaling Devices

While most observers and commercial fishing workers will go their entire careers without experiencing a catastrophic incident at sea, the fact remains that accidents happen. Two key pieces of equipment in the event of a serious accident are the personal **Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon**, or **EPIRB**, and the **Personal Locator Beacon**, or **PLB**. EPIRBs and PLBs are signaling devices that transmit distress signals to rescuers via a satellite system. EPIRBs, which are typically registered to a vessel, are activated either automatically (CAT I) or manually (CAT II). PLBs are registered to individuals and, as a norm, they **MUST** be activated **manually**.

What should observers know about EPIRBs?

As part of the pre-trip safety check, observers should ensure they locate and review the EPIRB. The checklist is a tool for observers and vessel owners, developed in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard vessel regulations, to ensure that the major safety equipment onboard is in compliance. Observers should also be familiar with national and regional policy on removing EPIRBs from their housing. In most cases, a vessel representative must remove the EPIRB for inspection and testing.

- **Know where the EPIRB is mounted.** EPIRBs are required to be mounted in a location where they can float free of the vessel in case of a sinking.



EPIRB in hydrostatic housing.



EPIRB in a mounting bracket.

- **Make sure the EPIRB is registered.** Any EPIRB on a vessel **MUST** be registered with NOAA; a dated registration sticker with a matching UIN with the device should be present on the device. (Learn more and register here: www.sarsat.noaa.gov/beacon.html)
- **Check the battery expiration as noted on the unit.**
- **Know how to activate and test.** EPIRBs can be **manually activated** by removing the manual bracket and placing in water or simply by pressing the power button. There is also a **test position** on the activation switch that allows the entire unit to be tested without generating a false alarm.
- **Once activated in an emergency situation, leave the EPIRB on** until you are rescued or receive specific instruction from the rescuing agency to turn it off.

What should observers know about PLBs?

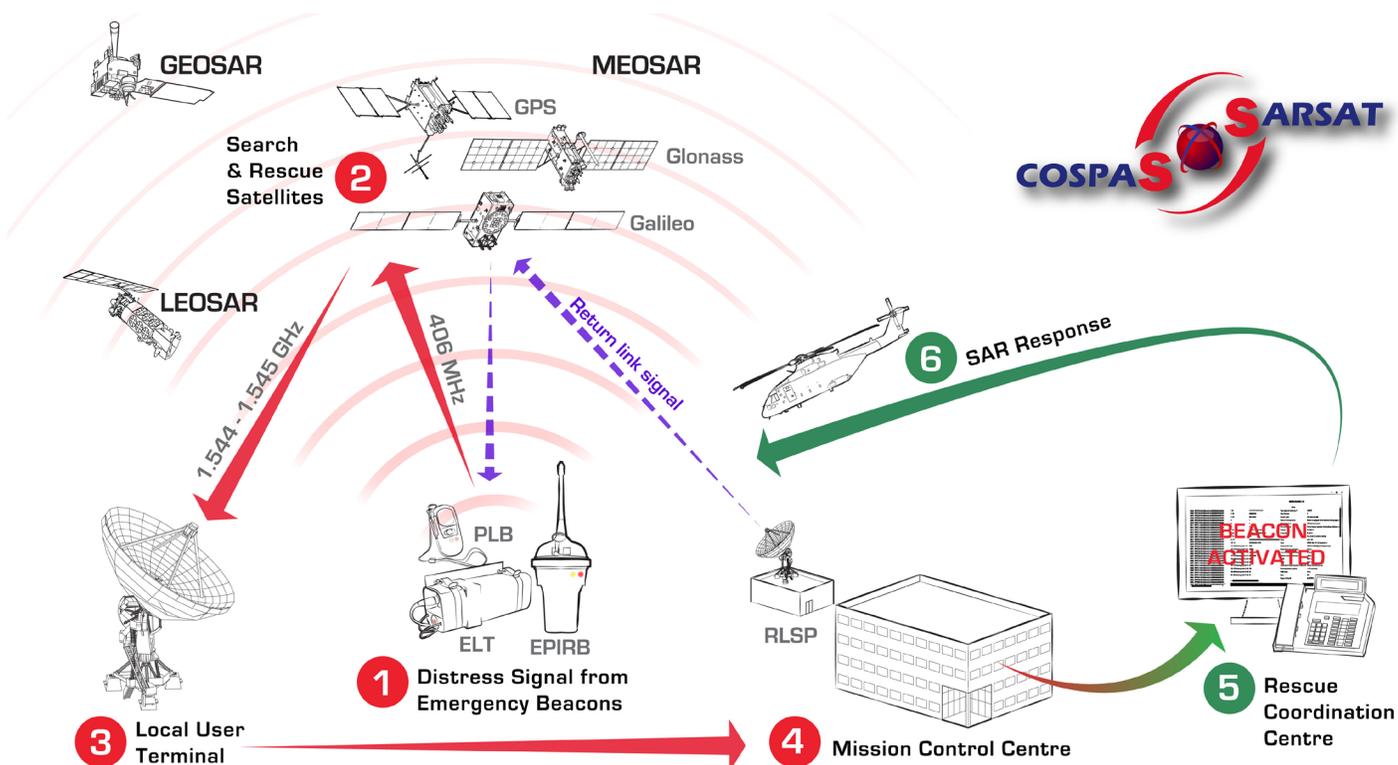
- **Attach to PFD or person.** PLBs should be attached to personal flotation devices at all times.
- **Know how to manually activate.** In the event of an emergency, PLBs **usually require manual activation.**
- **Make sure registration is current.** Like EPIRBs, PLBs must also be registered with NOAA and carry a dated registration sticker. (See www.sarsat.noaa.gov/beacon.html.)
- **Check the battery expiration as noted on the unit.**
- **Once activated in an emergency situation, leave the PLB on** until you are rescued or receive specific instruction from the rescuing agency to turn it off.

What should observers do in the event of an accidental activation of an EPIRB or PLB?

Contact the Coast Guard at 1-855-406-USCG (8724), and reach out to your observer program to alert them to a possible false alarm as soon as you are aware of the false activation.



PLB unit.



Overview of how EPIRBs and PLBs work within the NOAA-operated Search And Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking (SARSAT) System to detect and locate mariners, aviators, and recreational enthusiasts in distress. For more information, visit www.sarsat.noaa.gov/sys-diag.html.