# INFORMATION BULLETIN No. 06

## GMDSS-EPIRBs

### Guidance and Instructions for Bahamas Recognised Organisations, Bahamas Approved Nautical Inspectors, Ship Owners, Managers and Masters

## 1. Purpose

1.1. This Bulletin provides instructions for the registration of Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs) for Bahamian ships.

1.2. This Bulletin also provides details of a warning from Cospas-Sarsat on aftermarket battery packs used in EPIRBs.

## 2. Application

2.1. Applies to all EPIRBs carried on Bahamian ships.

## 3. Introduction

3.1. All flag State Administrations are required to maintain a database for EPIRBs fitted on their ships in order that immediate contact can be made with the Company[1] in the event of an EPIRB being activated.

3.2. The EPIRB database for Bahamian vessels is currently maintained by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

3.3. The previous arrangement whereby the EPIRB database was maintained by the United Kingdom Maritime & Coastguard Agency at MRCC Falmouth has been discontinued.

[1] *The "Company" means the owner or any other organisation or person, such as the manager, or the bareboat charterer, who has assumed responsibility for the operation of the ship.*


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3.4. The information in the database for each vessel includes various details including the name and contact details of the Company, the vessel's call sign and MMSI number and the EPIRB particulars.

3.5. The Company is required to advise the BMA of any changes in the information held on the EPIRB register in order that the database may be amended as necessary. **Lives may be put at risk if the database is not kept up to date.**

## 4. Registering an EPIRB or amending existing EPIRB details

4.1. The Company is to complete a Radio Licence Application Form (R108) indicating the new EPIRB details and forward to the Registration department along with the associated fee.

4.2. Current fees for the issue of a Radio Licence are as shown in BMA Information Bulletin 81.

4.3. Upon receipt of the completed form and the associated fee, a new Radio Licence Certificate will be issued to reflect the new EPIRB details.

4.4. Confirmation of all new EPIRB details will be forwarded by the BMA to the Bahamas Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA) to ensure that the ITU databases are updated.

## 5. Cospas-Sarsat warning on non-approved batteries in EPIRBs

5.1. At the twenty-sixth meeting of the Cospas-Sarsat Joint Committee held 12 to 20 June 2012, the Radio Technical Commission for Maritime Services (RTCM) brought to the committee's attention that beacon manufacturers had become aware of the marketing and sale of non-approved replacement batteries. While those batteries often were certified by a classification society or similar body, they were not approved by the beacon manufacturers nor tested within the beacon to Cospas-Sarsat type-approval standards.

5.2. Information gathered so far indicates that the issue is mainly confined to EPIRB batteries, with no evidence yet of widespread market availability of non-approved batteries for 406-MHz emergency locator transmitters (ELTs) or personal locator beacons (PLBs).

5.3. The RTCM further noted that non-approved battery packs often look very similar to original-equipment manufacturer (OEM) provided batteries and that it may not be evident to the casual observer that non-OEM battery packs are not always made to the same standards nor offer the same performance in beacons.

5.4. The RTCM advised that a number of beacon manufacturers had purchased replacement EPIRB battery packs from suppliers found on the Internet and had examined and tested those battery packs, identifying in various cases the following problems:

i. Battery cells non-compliant with the Cospas-Sarsat type-approval certificate (TAC), that is the cells used were not the approved cells listed in the TAC.

ii. Battery capacity much less than OEM batteries, resulting in decreased operational lifetime, below the specified requirement.

iii. Non-approved batteries not of the same weight as the OEM battery, which may lead to instability of an EPIRB while floating in the water and the positioning of the antenna ground plane at the incorrect height (compared to sea level), resulting in decreased transmission reliability.

iv. Battery pack casings that were missing proper metallization of the enclosure, risking a less efficient ground plane for the EPIRB and a reduction in radiated signal strength.

v. Battery cells unprotected by diodes and fuses specified by the battery manufacturer to prevent short circuits and reverse charging of cells.

vi. Battery packs missing (or having inferior) "kit" components such as instructions, and replacement gaskets, seals and other components necessary to maintain the watertight integrity of the beacon.

5.5. The Cospas-Sarsat Secretariat has placed on its website the following warning:

"*Cospas-Sarsat type approval is contingent on the use of original equipment battery packs in a beacon. Therefore, Cospas-Sarsat recommends that beacon owners always use original equipment battery packs which have been approved as a part of the original Cospas-Sarsat beacon approval and as provided either by a beacon manufacturer or one of their approved service centres. Certain aftermarket replacement battery packs that are not approved by the beacon manufacturer have*

*been shown to be of inferior quality and may result in safety risk and/or the failure of the beacon to function properly in a distress situation."*

5.6. The BMA recommends that Companies take note of the above warning and exercise caution when procuring replacement battery packs for EPIRBs and similar equipment.

## 6. Revision History

Rev.2 (11 February 2013) – Updated to new format and Cospas-Sarsat warning on batteries added.