

Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking (SARSAT) Policy

Title:

Customer Service Delivery Standards

Effective Date:

October 1, 2006

Purpose:

To establish standards of performance for customer service delivery to ensure accurate, timely, courteous and consistent service from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Search and Rescue Satellite Aided Tracking (SARSAT) program.

Applicability:

This policy applies to interactions between the SARSAT program and members of the public with which it interacts. This includes aviators, mariners and land-based users who own and operate emergency beacons and others who are interested in the SARSAT system. This interaction can be via telephone, email, postal mail, facsimile or in person.

This policy does not cover interactions with search and rescue services that comprise the other main customer group for the SARSAT program, nor does it describe relations with the media. Guidelines for interacting with these two communities are contained in separate policies.

Background:

Part of the President's Management Agenda is to have the Government become more citizen-centric and customer-focused and for agencies to improve their responsiveness to citizens. This applies to the SARSAT program which maintains a beacon registry for more than 160,000 beacon owners and routinely interacts with more than 50 people on a daily basis. Standards for performance are even more important for a program like SARSAT in NOAA where the customer base may be different from that of the many other products and services NOAA provides. The standards contained in this policy are derived from the report of the Citizen Service Levels Interagency Committee (CSLIC) Report. The CSLIC was established jointly by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the General Services Administration (GSA) and comprised representatives from 33 Executive branch agencies.

Relevant Policy Drivers:

- President's Management Agenda – requires the Government to become more citizen-centric and customer-focused
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998 – requires that all proposed technology solutions be fully accessible by individuals with disabilities

- Executive Order 13166 – “Improving Access to Services for People with Limited English Proficiency”
- Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA, Public Law 104-13) – aims to minimize the paperwork burden imposed on the public and ensures that the greatest possible benefit comes from the collection of information from the public
- Plain Language (www.plainlanguage.gov) – promotes use of plain language relative to the agency’s constituency

Policy:

The SARSAT program shall implement the standards listed below in the manner prescribed. NOAA will provide annual updates to the Program Steering Group on the status of implementation and performance with respect to customer service.

Standards

A. First Contact Resolution

Every attempt should be made to resolve customer issues the first time they contact the SARSAT program. First contact resolution occurs when a customer receives accurate, complete information, precluding the need for the customer to contact SARSAT again. The customer should have the option to speak to a supervisor at any time.

B. Complaints

Customers shall have the option to complain via one of the following contact channels: telephone, postal mail and email. Complaints shall be acknowledged and processed according to the timing guidelines provided below. Customers shall have the option to elevate their complaint should they desire to do so. The SARSAT Operations Lead shall develop and maintain standard operating procedures for escalation of customer issues.

C. Privacy

The SARSAT program shall provide their privacy policy on the web and registration forms. The privacy policy shall state the authority under which the SARSAT program collects personal data and how the data will be used. The customers shall be made aware when information is being retained for future reference in serving them or if information is collected from other sources.

The SARSAT program shall follow all privacy guidelines contained in its Privacy Impact Assessment and System of Record documentation, as well as requirements referenced in its Information Technology (IT) Security Certification and Accreditation process.

D. Plain Language

Use of technical terms and acronyms shall be limited as much as possible in customer communications. Acronyms shall be defined whenever used. Individuals interacting with customers should be trained in use of plain language and shall use prepared scripts where

possible. The SARSAT Operations Lead will develop and maintain standard operating procedures and appropriate scripts for staff dealing with the public.

E. Quality Assurance

The quality of customer interactions should be monitored and evaluated at least annually. Particular attention should be given to courtesy, timeliness, and accuracy of information provided. The SARSAT Operations Lead shall develop and maintain standard operating procedures for monitoring quality of customer interactions.

F. Customer Correspondence

The SARSAT program shall develop and maintain templates for routine customer correspondence. The templates shall be reviewed and updated as necessary on an annual basis. The SARSAT Operations Lead shall develop and maintain standard templates for routine customer correspondence.

G. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation

Performance measures to track customer satisfaction shall be developed and tracked as part of the SARSAT Performance Management Plan. To the extent possible, standard survey questions shall be used that are already approved by OMB for use by NOAA. The SARSAT Operations Lead and the SARSAT Operations Support Officer shall develop and maintain customer satisfaction performance measures.

H. Customer Interaction

a. Telephone Channel

The SARSAT program shall offer incoming toll-free services to callers within the United States.

All SARSAT staff members shall be cognizant of the proper routing of customer calls. For calls that are transferred the customer should be advised as to (a) where they are being transferred, (b) why they are being transferred, and (c) a telephone number in case the connection is lost during the transfer.

Recorded information shall be provided to callers if calls are received after normal business hours. The minimum information provided shall include the normal business hours and encourage callers to use other channels (e.g., the Internet) to resolve their issues.

Calls in response to customer voice messages shall be made no later than the next business day and at least two attempts should be made to reach the customer or their voice mail using the information provided by them (except for international calls).

Customer service representatives should strive to answer published customer service telephone lines within 30 seconds and provide notification to customers on hold that there is a continuing connection.

The SARSAT Operations Lead shall develop and maintain standard operating procedures and/or any training material to ensure proper routing of calls and response timelines. The SARSAT Operations Lead shall ensure that recorded information shall be provided to callers if calls are received after normal business hours. The SARSAT Operations Lead shall coordinate with local common IT services groups to ensure calls on hold indicate that there is a continuing connection.

b. Email and Web Response Channels

Email addresses designated for customer contacts shall always be monitored during normal business hours. The email address for customer inquiries shall be posted on the SARSAT web page and links should appear at a minimum on the homepage and entry points. An auto reply shall be provided to the customer advising them that the message has been received and when an answer will be provided. The auto reply shall also point them to other channels (e.g., frequently asked questions on the Internet) to resolve their issue quicker.

When an outgoing email is not successfully delivered (e.g., the mail box is full) the customer service staff shall make at least one additional attempt to respond to customer emails, except for situations such as an incorrect email address.

Best efforts should be made to redirect misdirected emails to the proper recipient. If the proper recipient is not known then the misdirected email should be forwarded to GSA's USA Services.

The maximum response time to simple or common questions shall be two business days 90% of the time. More complex questions which require research or involve multiple topics or organizations shall be answered at least 90% of the time within five business days (the staff should inform the customer within two business days of the status and estimated response time). For questions which involve personal data, complex policy issues, or time-consuming research, the customer shall be contacted within two days and provided an initial estimate of when a full response will be available, with an update provided every ten days thereafter.

Web response forms shall be used to collect and respond to customer issues. The web response form shall have a link to a frequently asked questions page and provide a reminder to the customer that email communications pass through spam filters at NOAA and at the customer's internet service provider.

Employee email address shall not be used to communicate with customers in order to minimize adverse impacts of leave and attrition on customer service levels.

The SARSAT Operations Lead and the SARSAT Operations Support Officer shall develop and maintain standard operating procedures to implement this email channel policy.

c. Postal Mail and Facsimile

Customer letter received by mail or facsimile shall be acknowledged by telephone, mail or email with an estimated response time if a complete answer cannot be provided within 15 business days. The topic, receipt date and date of response shall be tracked for all mail inquires to ensure that customers receive responses. Routing and processing procedures shall be in place for mail the public addresses to the leadership of NOAA as well as links to registration information on the NOAA homepage

d. Web Interfaces

A “contact us” page shall be employed on the SARSAT web site with at least the following information: (a) telephone number, (b) postal mail address, (c) email address, and (d) contact information for other customer support channels as applicable. Applicable contact information for the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Coast Guard shall also be provided on the web page.

A “Frequency Asked Questions” page shall be prominently accessible from the SARSAT home page. Questions and corresponding answers posted shall be reviewed at least annually for accuracy and relevance.

The SARSAT program shall coordinate with the NOAA web page search function to ensure questions related to SARSAT and especially beacon registration are linked to the SARSAT web site.

e. Person to Person Interaction

Person to person interaction constitutes out of office events such as presentations, booths and training. Prior to any such event the primary purpose and goals of the outreach will be discussed and agreed upon between the participants and the program lead.

Implementation

The SARSAT Operations Lead and SARSAT Operations Support Officers will develop and maintain the appropriate standard operating procedures, training materials and capabilities to implement the standards listed above.

The standards will be included in the relevant employee performance plans and work plans as well as written into performance-based contracts for the operations and maintain of the SARSAT system.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Program Steering Group shall be responsible for maintaining and updating this policy. NOAA shall be responsible for implementing this policy and providing a status to the Program Steering Group.

Approved By:

SARSAT Program Steering Group on [October 1, 2006]