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NATIONAL  
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ADMINISTRATION

CONTACT: Patricia Viets, NOAA  
(301) 457-5005

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**SATELLITE PROCESSING OF 121.5/243 MHz EMERGENCY BEACONS  
TO BE TERMINATED ON FEB. 1, 2009**

The International Cospas-Sarsat Program, a program that uses a satellite constellation to relay distress alerts to search and rescue authorities, announced at its 25<sup>th</sup> Council Session that it plans to terminate satellite processing of distress signals from 121.5/243 MHz emergency beacons on Feb. 1, 2009. Mariners, aviators, and individuals using emergency beacons will need to switch to those operating at 406 MHz if they want to be detected by satellites.

The termination of 121.5/243 MHz processing is planned far enough into the future to allow users adequate time for the transition to the 406 MHz beacon. The Cospas-Sarsat Program has approved a plan for the phasing out of 121.5/243 MHz satellite alerting services that address practical aspects of the phaseout. This decision is a follow-on to Cospas-Sarsat's announcement last year that it would no longer carry 121.5/243 MHz search and rescue instruments starting in 2006 for Russian satellites and 2009 for the U.S. satellites, operated by the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Cospas-Sarsat Program made the decision to terminate 121.5/243 MHz satellite alerting services, in part, in response to guidance from the International Maritime Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization. These two agencies of the United Nations are responsible for regulating the safety on international transits of ships and aircraft, respectively, and handling international standards and plans for maritime and aviation search and rescue. More than 180 nations are members of IMO and ICAO.

Another major factor in the decision to stop satellite processing of 121.5/243 MHz signals is due to problems in this frequency band which inundate search and rescue authorities with false alerts, adversely impacting the effectiveness of lifesaving services. Although the 406 MHz beacons cost more, they provide search and rescue agencies with more reliable and complete information to do their job more efficiently and effectively.

NOAA, along with the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Air Force and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, is responsible for implementing the Cospas-Sarsat Program at the national level in the United States.

The implication of this Cospas-Sarsat decision is that users of beacons that send distress alerts on 121.5 /243 MHz should eventually begin using beacons operating on 406 MHz if the alerts are to be detected and relayed via satellites. Meanwhile, anyone planning to buy a new distress beacon may wish to take the Cospas-Sarsat decision into account.

The three types of beacons in use are: emergency locator transmitters (ELTs), used on airplanes; emergency position-indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs), used on boats; and personal locator beacons (PLBs) used by land-based persons such as hikers.