

Be ready in 15 minutes for new Personal Locator Beacon registration requirements

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Online process is free, quick and could make a difference between life or death.

New measures to strengthen search and rescue response to incidents involving people with Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) will come into force from 15 April.

An update by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) will require registration of all current and new PLBs – online and at no cost – that are carried on board a UK flagged vessel, hovercraft or mechanically propelled watercraft, such as jet skis.

When PLBs are discarded or change ownership, the new details must also be provided.

The change brings PLBs under regulations that have applied for 26 years to Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs).

When a registered PLB or EPIRB is activated, HM Coastguard can use the details supplied, such as emergency contacts, to gain crucial information to support rescue efforts and send the best resources to help.

False alarms can be traced more efficiently too, keeping rescue teams on readiness for real emergencies and avoiding unnecessary missions into potentially dangerous conditions.

The registration requirement does not apply to PLBs on unpowered craft such as paddleboards, kayaks and canoes – although the MCA encourages all PLBs to be registered.

PLB rescue case study:

- Locator beacons bring rescue to crew of dismasted yacht drifting in the dark:
hmcoastguard.uk/news/locator-beacons-bring-rescue-crew-dismasted-yacht-drifting-dark

PLB registration - real life searches:

- London calling: An unregistered PLB broadcasting from London sparked three separate searches during July and August 2025. Activations were traced once to Ealing and twice to Paddington. Each time emergency services were alerted and stood down hours later, with no one found to be in distress.
- Waste of time: A PLB dumped at a waste recycling centre was the source of an alert in Exeter which scrambled Dawlish Coastguard Rescue Team in January 2023. Without an update of its disused status, and calls to registered numbers going unanswered, the search continued for about two hours until the PLB could be traced to a skip and destroyed.
- Boxed-in boat: A boat in a box was the riddle deciphered by HM Coastguard, thanks to contact details registered to a PLB activated in Antigua in February 2023. A search wasn't required as it was quickly ascertained that the accidental alert was from kit inside a seagoing rowing boat

packed-up for return to the UK having recently crossed the Atlantic.

UK Distress & Security Beacon Registry Manager Linda Goulding said:

The benefit of registering your PLB is simple: it gives you – and everyone you're with – a headstart to being rescued from an emergency.

The registration process is free, takes just 15 minutes, and could make the difference between life or death. You can do it at no cost online in time for the deadline of 15 April.

HM Coastguard will react to every beacon alert we receive. Registering your PLB helps us quickly work out when it's a false alarm with no one in danger, or to focus our resources when people are in real distress and need our help. Help us to help you.

To register a PLB or EPIRB with the UK Beacon Registry, visit <https://www.gov.uk/register-406-beacons>, call +44 (0)20 3817 2006 or email ukbeacons@mcga.gov.uk

To find out more visit MGN 665 (M+F) Amendment 1 Mandatory registration of EPIRBs and PLBs.

Background

The update relates to the UK revoking and replacing the Merchant Shipping (EPIRB Registration) Regulations 2000 with the Merchant Shipping (EPIRB and PLB Registration) (Radiocommunications) (Amendment) Regulations 2026 to include updated registration requirements for EPIRBs and introduce new registration requirements for PLBs.

The Regulations also amend other Statutory Instruments, including the Merchant Shipping (Radiocommunications) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 and the Merchant Shipping (Watercraft) Order 2023.

These amendments include the implementation of discrete changes to international safety requirements under SOLAS Chapter IV and necessary changes as a consequence of the proposed Regulations being introduced.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/be-ready-in-15-minutes-for-new-personal-locator-beacon-registration-requirements>