



MEDIA RELEASE

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Immediate Use

ALMOST 3600 LIVES SAVED DUE TO DISTRESS BEACONS

About 255 people are saved each year due to distress beacons, new figures from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority show.

Since October 1989, 3574 people have been saved from emergency situations on land and at sea by activating their distress beacon. Distress Beacons are also called EPIRBs (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons).

From January to June this year, 239 people have been rescued after activating a distress beacon – the highest six monthly figure record by AMSA since 1989.

"It shows that distress beacons are becoming a vital component of the safety landscape and they are clearly proving their worth in emergencies," AMSA's Chief Executive Officer, Clive Davidson said.

Distress beacons transmit a radio signal that is detected by satellite and overflying aircraft. All detections are relayed to Australian Search and Rescue (AusSAR) in Canberra which is part of AMSA.

In a recent rescue involving a distress beacon, seven people were saved from a sinking boat off the NSW far south coast.

The recreational fishing boat *Sea Hunter* set off a beacon after being swamped by a large wave while fishing about 50 nautical miles (92.6 kms) east of Merimbula.

Australian Search and Rescue tasked Canberra's SouthCare helicopter and an Australian Aerial Patrol fixed-wing aircraft from Wollongong to respond.

The fishing vessel, *Melissa*, which had also responded to a call for assistance from AusSAR, arrived at the sinking boat's position just after the aircraft. The *Melissa* picked up the seven people as they were preparing to abandon ship.

There are major changes looming in the distress beacon system. Currently there are two types of distress beacons, one transmitting on the analogue 121.5 MHz frequency and the other on the digital 406 MHz frequency.

From 2009 only 406 MHz beacons will be detected. The decision to eliminate 121.5 MHz has been made by the international council that controls the rescue satellite system in a bid to reduce the 97 per cent false alarm rate from analogue beacons.

Further information:

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