



AMSA Safety Alert

Float-free EPIRBs

New requirements commencing 1 January 2021

The purpose

This safety alert aims to raise awareness of the need for owners, operators, masters and crew of certain domestic commercial vessels (DCVs) to install a float-free emergency position indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) **before 1 January 2021**.

You will need to install a float-free EPIRB if your vessel is operating more than two nautical miles from land and:

- is more than 12 m in length, or
- is between 7.5 m and 12 m in length with no level-flotation fitted, and operating in B or C waters

[Find out more about if this applies to you.](#)

Why are float-free EPIRBs required?

The requirement to install a float-free EPIRB is in response to incidents where commercial vessels have sunk too quickly for the crew to deploy their EPIRB in time, leading to a delay in search and rescue operations and a tragic loss of life.



What is a float-free EPIRB?

- A float-free EPIRB is a water-activated distress beacon fitted in a float-free bracket.
- It is designed to activate when a vessel sinks to a depth of 1–4 metres.

- It uses a hydrostatic release device and a water-activated switch.
- With a clear path, it floats to the surface and transmits a distress signal.
- A float-free EPIRB can also be manually activated in the event of an emergency.

This video shows how a float-free EPIRB automatically deploys underwater.



Installation of float-free EPIRBs

The effectiveness of a float-free EPIRB depends on where the unit is mounted on the vessel.

A float-free EPIRB should be mounted:

- on the outside of the vessel. Note—the vessel may roll over when sinking, so take this into consideration when deciding where to mount it
- in a clear open space away from any obstructions so it can float to the surface
- where it is easy to access in an emergency and if manual activation is required
- in an area where it won't be impacted by high-pressure water spray and inclement sea states
- where it is protected from damage.

Manufacturers include detailed advice on how to install and maintain a float-free EPIRB in their instruction manuals.

This video includes information about the use and installation of float-free EPIRBs.



Safety management system

Make sure your safety management system (SMS) includes:

- emergency procedures, taking into account the location of the float-free EPIRB and when manual activation may be required
- training and induction for crew members on the use of and location of the float-free EPIRB
- ensuring the float-free EPIRB is correctly mounted in its bracket as part of pre-departure checks
- planned maintenance and inspection of your float-free EPIRB, its bracket and hydrostatic release unit
- periodic testing of your float-free EPIRB in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, to ensure it will transmit properly in an emergency situation
- registration details of your float-free EPIRB, and a reminder to check and update the details.

Common issues to avoid

To ensure correct activation of your float-free EPIRB and reduce the likelihood of accidental activations, the following advice should be considered

- Each float-free EPIRB model comes with its own bracket. To ensure EPIRBs activate correctly, do not use a different make or model bracket.
- Ensure the float-free EPIRB cord does not get caught in the bracket lid.
- Do not attach the float-free EPIRB cord to the vessel.
- Ensure the float-free EPIRB is correctly mounted in the bracket.
- Ensure the approved hydrostatic release unit model has been installed correctly.

Compliance

The requirement to have a float-free EPIRB on certain vessels was announced in July 2018. Hence, owners have had over two years in which to purchase and install one. If you haven't already installed a float-free EPIRB, you are strongly encouraged to do so as soon as possible. If you do not have a float-free EPIRB properly installed and registered with AMSA by 1 January 2021, you can expect appropriate compliance action to be taken.

Benefits of GPS

A GPS-equipped float-free EPIRB can mean all the difference in an emergency situation. GPS-equipped EPIRBs provide a much more accurate location to search and rescue authorities. AMSA strongly recommends the installation of a GPS-equipped EPIRB.

The infographic features a dark blue background. On the left is a stylized illustration of an AMSA 406 MHz GPS EPIRB. To its right, the text 'GPS IS BEST' is written in large, white, bold letters. Below this, a light blue arrow points to the right, containing the text 'With GPS' and 'Accurate to within 120m'. The background of the lower half of the infographic is a satellite map of a coastal city. A circular inset provides a magnified view of a bridge over a river, with a small white dot indicating a precise location. Below the inset, a dark blue banner contains the text 'Without GPS' and 'Accurate to within 5km'.

AMSA
406 MHz
GPS EPIRB

GPS IS BEST

With GPS
Accurate to within 120m

Without GPS
Accurate to within 5km

Registration

A registered EPIRB allows AMSA search and rescue to phone your emergency contacts and look up important information about your vessel, and to initiate a response as soon as possible. An

unregistered EPIRB can cause a delay in the response.

It is mandatory to [register your EPIRB](#).

Reminder

- Ensure the float-free EPIRB is installed on the vessel and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Ensure your EPIRB is inspected and tested regularly.
- Review your risk assessment and SMS for your operation.
- Ensure your EPIRB is registered with AMSA and all your details are up to date.

More information

Should you require any further assistance or information, please contact AMSA Connect on 1800 627 484, +61 2 6279 5000 or via email to AMSAConnect@amsa.gov.au

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