Accidental activation
If a distress beacon is activated by accident, the most important thing to do is to turn it off and let AMSA know as soon as possible on free call 1800 641 792, free call WA Water Police on 131 444 or contact your nearest volunteer marine rescue group.

Unauthorised use of distress beacons
Distress beacons have a very serious purpose. Falsely indicating distress rightly carries a severe penalty, but it also wastes a lot of time and resources – possibly weakening the ability to respond to a genuine emergency.

When you are not using your boat, removing your equipment and giving it secure storage will help prevent unauthorised use.

Testing
Regularly use the test switch as per the manufacturer's user manual to verify power/operation.

Storage
Store EPIRBs in an accessible place where they can be retrieved easily but away from areas where they might be knocked or accidentally activated. Ensure the EPIRB container is not cracked or showing signs of damage and all on board know where it is and how to activate it.

Disposal of unwanted distress beacons
Distress beacons need to be disposed of responsibly to avoid accidental activation. Do not dispose of a beacon in general waste as it will end up in landfill and could be activated inadvertently. Unwanted beacons can be handed in for safe disposal to any DoT office listed in this brochure. You could also contact your local Battery World store to check whether they disconnect and dispose of beacons. A small fee may apply. Locations of Battery World outlets can be found on their website: www.batteryworld.com.au Alternatively, the manufacturer’s instructions often contains information about how to disconnect the beacon battery. Then contact your local waste management facility to ask about disposing of your unwanted beacon in an environmentally friendly way. A small fee may apply.

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What is a distress beacon?

A distress beacon is an electronic transmitter you can use to alert rescuers that you are in a life threatening situation and need to be rescued. Lives are saved when skippers carry beacons.

Beacon types

Choose a beacon that is suitable to your vessel and activity:

EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon)

An EPIRB designed for marine use will float and keep the antennae above the water, has a lanyard to secure it to something that’s not going to sink and can operate continuously for 48 hours.

PLB (Personal Locator Beacon)

is a smaller portable beacon and is designed to be worn or carried by an individual. Some PLBs do not float and may not be designed for use in water. A PLB usually has a shorter battery life than an EPIRB and will only operate for approximately 24 hours.

When is an EPIRB/PLB required?

All boats must carry a compliant EPIRB if proceeding more than two nautical miles from the mainland shore or more than 400 metres from an island located more than two nautical miles from the mainland shore. Note: PLBs do not meet carriage requirements for replacement of EPIRBs on boats.

Vessel type

Yacht

Motor boat

Personal water craft

PLBs are for personal use only

Vessel type

Recreational canoes or paddle craft, kayaks, surf skis, inflatables, windsurfers or kitesurfers must carry a compliant PLB or EPIRB if proceeding more than 2 n miles from the mainland shore or more than 400 metres from an island located more than 2 n miles from the mainland shore. If carrying a PLB this must be attached to the person on the craft in case you become separated from your vessel.

What is a compliant distress beacon?

To be approved for marine use an EPIRB or PLB must display the following standards.

EPIRB

(AS/NZS 4280.1)

PLBs

(AS/NZS 4280.2)

To be compliant a distress beacon must also have an in date battery.

Battery expiry

The distress beacon battery is required by law to be in date. If it expires, replace the unit with a new one from a supplier.

If your distress beacon battery date stamp has expired the distress beacon is non-compliant and you may be fined.

Global Positioning System used in EPIRBs

For your best chance of survival a Global Positioning System (GPS) distress beacon will provide rescuers with a signal to a location accuracy of 120 metres and the satellite detection time is greatly reduced. A non GPS distress beacon has a location accuracy of five kilometres and requires a number of passing satellites to detect and pinpoint your location.

The information contained in this publication is provided in good faith and believed to be accurate at time of publication. The State shall in no way be liable for any loss sustained or incurred by anyone relying on the information.