

SAFETY ALERT

Contact: safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk

SUBJECT	Personal Locator Beacons (PLB's) INCIDENTS 2019 Calling for help at Sea
Date Issued	August 2019

In the first half of 2019 there were over a dozen emergency callouts and rescues of sea paddlers. The need to have a means of calling for help, which is to hand, has been demonstrated by the success of these rescues.

Recent incidents have often involved experienced paddlers who did not expect to get into trouble. Typically they were:

- In environments or conditions they felt familiar with
- Paddling alone or in a small group
- Carrying basic emergency equipment or clothing
- Subject to an unforeseen incident or had underestimated the conditions
- As a minimum carried a mobile phone in a water proof case as a means of communication.

Some of these paddlers had invested in Personal Locator Beacons (PLB's). These are becoming far more popular given their ease to carry, effectiveness in calling for help and pinpoint satellite location. At a cost of around £200 with no further ongoing charges they last, typically, between 5 – 6 years making them a good long term investment.

They have proven their success in effecting quick and efficient rescue's even in remote locations. Some of the incidents recorded in 2019 where PLB's were activated are:

	Month	LOCATION	INCIDENT	PLB activation to rescue time
1	January	Cornwall	Individual paddling alone, capsized and dislocated shoulder	Falmouth Lifeboat. 30 minutes
<i>The paddler commented: I was praised by the crew as the PLB gave them my exact location where I was and they were able to track me. Furthermore staying with kayak and wearing the right clothing, having and doing the right things saved my life.</i>				
2	March	East coast of Scotland	Two ski's, one unable to remount due to conditions and cold	Kinghorn Lifeboat. 40 minutes
<i>Jonathan Mustard, Senior Maritime Operations Officer for HM Coastguard said: 'This is a great example of how a Personal Locator Beacon, when properly used and registered, can save a person's life. These kayakers ensured that, should they get into difficulty whilst out at sea, they had the right equipment to give them the best chance of being located and rescued.</i>				
3	April	Thurso	Lone paddler stranded on rocks, boat adrift	Thurso Lifeboat 30 minutes
<i>RNLI Coxswain Dougie Munro said 'This is a great example of the importance of carrying a means for calling for help, such as a PLB. Because of the kayaker's preparations, the locator beacon directed us straight to him. He was exhausted and suffering the effects of being in the cold water. Time was important; any delay in finding him might have led to a different outcome'.</i>				

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How do they work?

A PLB is manually activated and transmits a distress alert directly to the Coastguard via satellites on the 406MHz frequency. The Coastguard then uses this to call out the relevant Search and Rescue Service. This enables the rescue services to pinpoint your exact location without any further description and reach the scene quickly.

Because PLB's work on satellites, once activated, your PLB must have a clear line of "vision" to the sky. This means that it must be kept above the water, so considering how to attach it to your buoyancy aid in an operating position is good idea to free up your hands. It will not work if you have overhead obstructions such as being in a cave.

They transmit for 24 hours plus and can be used where there is no mobile phone signal.

What to look for when buying a PLB

There are many PLB's on the market. Look for the ones that are:

- GPS enabled
- Transmit a homing signal on VHF (all PLB's also transmit on 121.5mhz)
- Classified as being for Maritime use as these will be waterproof
- Able to float but can also be attached to you or your buoyancy aid
- Easy to use if you are in the water
- Can be used one handed if you are in the water, freeing up your other hand

Registration

Once you have bought your PLB there is no subscription fee and the battery can last around 5 – 6 years.

However you **MUST REGISTER** your PLB with the Coastguard (MCA). This can be done by visiting the Government web site <https://www.gov.uk/maritime-safety-weather-and-navigation/register-406-mhz-beacons>

Other communication and signalling devices

There are many different communication and signalling devices designed for use at sea. It is important that you choose the right one that works in the environment you paddle in.

A full range of communication devices can be found

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/uploads/documents/Calling-for-help.pdf>

By submitting incident reports to British Canoeing you can help us to identify and address issues within the sport. To report an incident go to <https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/go-canoeing/incident-reporting>