



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AVIATION MANAGEMENT

AVIATION ACCIDENT PREVENTION BULLETIN

No. AAPB 09-01

January 30, 2009

Page 1 of 2

Subject: Termination of Satellite Monitoring of 121.5/243.0 MHz ELT's. - ARE YOU READY?

Area of Concern: Flight Safety

Distribution: All Aviation Personnel

Discussion: On February 1, 2009, the International Cospas-Sarsat Organization will terminate processing of distress signals emitted by 121.5/243.0 MHz Emergency Locator Transmitters (ELTs). Pilots flying aircraft equipped with 121.5/243.0 MHz ELTs after that date will have to depend on pilots of over-flying aircraft and/or ground stations monitoring 121.5/243.0 to hear and report distress alert signals transmitted from a possible crash site.

Currently only 12-15% of the registered aircraft in the United States are flying with 406 MHz ELTs. This means that there is at least an 85% chance that an aircraft in an accident will only transmit a 121.5/243.0 MHz signal, thus remaining silent to the satellites. It will be up to other pilots monitoring the 121.5/243.0 MHz frequency in the cockpit to alert Search and Rescue authorities to accidents involving aircraft that transmit distress signals on 121.5/243.0. When you fly, look out for your fellow pilots and when possible monitor 121.5/243.0 MHz.

If a 121.5/243.0 MHz ELT is heard on guard, report to the nearest air traffic control facility, the time and location of when you first detect the ELT, when it is the loudest and when it drops off your radio. Listening and reporting may well be the difference that saves a life.

The Cospas-Sarsat System has been and will continue processing emergency signals transmitted by 406 MHz ELTs. These 5 Watt digital beacons transmit a much stronger signal, are more accurate, verifiable and traceable to the registered beacon owner (406 MHz ELTs must be registered by the owner in accordance with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulation at www.beaconregistration.noaa.gov). Registration allows search and rescue authorities to contact the beacon owner, or his or her designated alternate by telephone to determine if a real emergency exists. Therefore, a simple telephone call often solves a 406 MHz alert without launching costly and limited search and rescue resources, which are necessary for a 121.5/243.0 MHz alert.

A WORD OF CAUTION. There have been repeated instances during maintenance testing where 406 MHz ELTs have triggered a response from the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center. The 406 MHz ELTs are still relatively new to General Aviation. All pilots and maintenance personnel should reference the appropriate ELT maintenance manual prior to testing or performing maintenance on these units to ensure proper procedures are being followed.

Subject: Termination of Satellite Monitoring of 121.5/243.0 MHz ELT's. - ARE YOU READY?

To prevent a false distress signal, manufacturers recommend that all tests be performed within the first 5 minutes of the hour and that the test signal duration not exceed 5 seconds.

Most DOI fleet aircraft have been retrofitted with the 406 MHz ELT. Complete retrofit is estimated to be complete within six months.

For further information concerning the termination of 121.5/243.0 MHz data processing visit www.sarsat.noaa.gov or contact Guy Exon, AMD Technical Services, Aircraft Maintenance Specialist, at 208-433-5082 with any questions.

/s/ Robert Galloway
Robert Galloway
Aviation Safety Manager



ARTEX ME-406 MHz ELT