

## EPIRBs recommended, not mandatory

Following discussion with many entrants in the Baltic Sprint Cup over the requirement for a 406 EPIRB, the organizing committee has decided to change the status of the 406 EPIRB to *recommended*.

In race of category 3 the principal required means of calling for help (other than by EPIRB) are pyrotechnic flares and the main VHF radio. Advantages of flares include that they are relatively cheap - disadvantages, that they are only transient and may not be seen in bad weather. The main VHF can be an excellent way of calling for help but a regular yacht installation is not waterproof and will fail if the electrics go down.

The 406 EPIRB uses a multi-million-Euro network of satellites maintained free of charge to the end user by the governments of Canada, France, Russia and the UK connected to a network of rescue stations worldwide (see <http://www.cospas-sarsat.org/>). Compared with the old 121.5 MHz EPIRB the 406 is a great advance – it has a stronger signal and longer duration (typically at least 48 hours). It is waterproof and floats and has its own power. Each 406 is individually registered with an official database so rescue authorities know the vessel identity very quickly. Unfortunately the German official database will not accept registrations in some cases though other databases are open to all.

A 406 beacon has to conform to stringent standards, typically has a warranty life of 5 years and a service life of much longer: it is therefore a very reasonable investment. The cost of a beacon varies with the degree of sophistication – simple ones around 450 Euros and top of the range around 1800 Euros. Hired beacons may be had from about 45 euros per week.

In offshore race management, organizers have to decide on the Special Regulations category taking into account the likely conditions. The Baltic Sprint Cup 2006 probably falls mid-way between Category 3 (no EPIRB specified) and Category 2 (EPIRB mandatory). There is no absolute definition and conditions can of course vary widely. Noting that, in the BSC 2006 there are no tracking beacons on the boats, the committee considered carriage of 406 beacons to be reasonable. However difficulties over the cost of purchase and in some cases, registration have been recognised and the decision on whether or not to carry a 406 beacon will now be that of the person-in-charge.

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