SAFETY BULLETIN 02 OF 2022:

EPIRBS coded with the maritime user protocol

The vessel MMSI must start with a valid country code (232 -235 for UK or Jersey Vessels)

This Safety Bulletin is issued to ensure that owners and operators of Jersey Vessels are aware of information released by the MCA on 18 August 2022 in the form of their own Safety Bulletin 30 a link to which is below:

Safety Bulletin 30 – EPIRBs coded with the maritime user protocol: the vessel MMSI must start with a valid country code (232-235)

Owners and operators of Jersey vessels are advised that distress alerts from EPIRBs* (*Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons) using the Maritime User Protocol (and codes with an MMSI that do not start with a valid country code) will be processed as invalid and discarded or delayed by the COSPAS-SARSAT system.
This could mean that when activated, either manually or by float-free release in an emergency, the distress signal generated will not be passed to the relevant SAR authority.

Background
Recently the International COSPAS-SARSAT Programme has become aware of EPIRBs coded using Maritime User Protocol with an MMSI of '9'. **In such cases the COSPAS-SARSAT system processes a distress alert as invalid and discards or delays them.**

An MMSI starting '9' may result from either coding:

- a 'daughter-craft' MMSI which starts '98'; or,
- where the EPIRB has an AIS beacon, encoding the beacons AIS identity, starting '97' in place of a ships MMSI

When using the Maritime User Protocol, UK (and Jersey), EPIRBs must code the MMSI starting 232, 233, 234 or 235 that was issued to the vessel by Ofcom.

For 'daughter-craft', the coded MMSI must be that of the parent vessel.

Note: **'97'** is intended only for the identity message of the **AIS transmitter** and **NOT** for the 406 MHz EPIRB transmitter

Required actions: No 408MHz EPIRB should be programmed using 98 or 97

- The EPIRB may be coded with a serial identity (rather than an MMSI Identity), using Serial Location Protocol or Serial User Protocol as stated in MGN 665. (see link below)

- For an EPIRB of a 'daughter-craft' associated with a parent ship, if an MMSI is used as the EPIRB identity, the MMSI should be the MMSI of the parent ship, or an MMSI specifically assigned to the craft (with a country code of 232-235). Note: there is a separate programming field that provides for separate numerical values to distinguish different EPIRBs aboard the parent ship and various associated 'daughter-craft'.

- New 'second-generation' EPIRBs have a message field for a complete nine-digit MMSI that is separate from the EPIRB's country code field. These EPIRBs also have a separate field specifically to match the '974' AIS identity for EPIRB-AIS devices. Therefore, the issues raised above should not occur on these EPIRBs provided the fields are coded correctly. Noting that the country code used must still be a valid MID.

Legal Requirements

Please note that it is the owner's responsibility that EPIRBs are registered in accordance with MGN 655 (as in link above).

Owners are requested to check and verify the coding of the EPIRBs aboard their vessel(s).

Related Documents: https://cospas-sarsat.int/en/documents-pro/system-documents