

The information contained herein has been prepared by the Malta Communications Authority (MCA) for general guidance purposes. The provided information should not be considered as a legally binding document and is without prejudice to any obligations stipulated under the Electronic Communications (Regulation) Act ([Cap. 399](#)), the General Authorisations (Radiocommunications Apparatus) Regulations ([S.L.399.40](#)) and any other applicable legislation. In the event that such information should conflict with any laws or regulations, the latter shall prevail at all times.

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Q.1 What is a 406 MHz Personal Locator Beacon (PLB)?

- A. A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) is a battery-powered emergency satellite transmitter which sends a coded 406 MHz signal when activated by a person in distress. It will assist rescue authorities in their search to locate the person/s in distress.

Q.2 Are PLBs the same as Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs) and Emergency Locator Transmitters (ELTs)?

- A. **No.** Although PLBs operate on the same platform of EPIRBs and ELTs, PLBs are registered to a person rather than to a vessel or aircraft.

Moreover, PLBs are voluntary fitted and can never replace a mandatory carriage of an EPIRB on board a vessel or an ELT on board an aircraft. PLBs also have various technical limitations when compared to EPIRBs/ELTs.

Q.3 From where can I use my PLB?

- A. A PLB may be used from on board Maltese-registered vessels and aircraft as well as from land. However, its use shall be in accordance with the applicable regulations.

Q.4 When can I use my PLB?

- A. **A PLB should only be used when there is a threat of grave and imminent danger (as a last resort)** when conventional communication facilities are not available at that particular time.

Q.5 Do I need to apply for a radio licence to use my PLB?

- A. No. PLBs are regulated by the General Authorisation (Radio Communications Apparatus) Regulations (S.L.399.40) and do not carry any licence fees. These Regulations establish the regulatory conditions which should be adhered to by all PLB owners/users.

Q.6 Do I have to hold a specified qualification to use my PLB?

- A. No. PLBs are to be used only when no other alerting means are available and in distress/emergency situations only. For this reason, the use of PLBs will not require an operator certificate. This, however, does not exempt individuals in possession of PLBs to comply with the relevant regulatory conditions.

Q.7 I am in possession of a PLB. Do I have to apply for an MMSI?

- A. **No, an MMSI is not required to be assigned for PLBs!**

A PLB should never be programmed with an MMSI assigned to a vessel!

Instead each PLB will be identified by its 15-digit Unique Identification Number (UIN). The latter identity is more commonly referred to as the beacon 15 Hex Identification or beacon 15 Hex ID.

Q.8 Are there any specific technical requirements that I have to look at when purchasing a PLB?

- A. Yes. It is a legal requirement for PLBs to have an internal Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS), e.g. GPS. Such equipment shall also be in compliance with the applicable European Union law concerning conformity assessment and must be CE marked.

Q.9 What do I have to do after purchasing a PLB?

- A. PLBs shall be programmed with country code 256. This programming is normally done by the local dealer, using the Standard Location Protocol.

PLB owners must register their PLB online, through the Cospas-Sarsat International 406 MHz Beacon Registration Database (IBRD) available at www.406registration.com.

Further general information about radio beacons and the IBRD may be found in the following links from the Cospas-Sarsat website:

Beacon FAQ:

<https://www.cospas-sarsat.int/en/beacon-ownership/beacon-registration-faq>

Videos:

<https://www.cospas-sarsat.int/en/search-and-rescue/programme-videos-en>

Q.10 What is the purpose of registering a PLB in the International 406 MHz Beacon Registration Database (IBRD)?

- A. Registration information is vital to Search and Rescue (SAR) services while undertaking SAR operations; it is to the benefit of all PLB owners to have a registered beacon in the event of a distress.

Q.11 How long is my registration information valid in the IBRD?

- A. **You should confirm your registration information in the IBRD every two years.** However, you are encouraged to provide updates to your registration anytime a change of information occurs. Beacon registrations that have not been updated or confirmed for 10 years will be removed from the database.

Q.12 Can I use my Maltese-coded PLB in another country?

- A. Not all countries allow the use of PLBs within their territory. In this regard it is suggested to check with the competent authorities of such countries prior to importing the PLB.

Q.13 Can a visitor (non-Maltese resident) carry a PLB while in Malta?

- A. Yes, but visitors must at all times ensure compliance with the applicable provisions of the General Authorisation (Radiocommunications Apparatus) Regulations (S.L.399.40).

Q.14 What happens if I activate my PLB by mistake?

- A. Don't panic, as long as it is a genuine mistake. You must turn off your PLB immediately and contact the emergency services of the region where you are located as quickly as possible to let them know that your transmission is a false alert. It should be noted that the national Rescue Coordination Centre designated for Search & Rescue is RCC Malta, reachable through telephone numbers +356 2249 4202 / 3.

Q.15 I do not need to use my PLB anymore, what should I do?

- A. You should ensure that when you dispose of your beacon (for example when it is damaged) it should be made inoperable. The battery shall be removed at all times.

The IBRD must be updated accordingly.

Q.16 I intend to sell my registered PLB to third parties, what should I do?

- A. You should log on to the www.406registration.com website and change the status of your beacon to SOLD. Until you do this, the person who bought the beacon cannot register the beacon under his/her own name.

Q.17 I intend to purchase a registered PLB from third parties, what should I do?

- A. The person you bought the beacon from must have changed the status of the beacon to SOLD if it was registered in the IBRD. Once this has been done, you can simply log on to the IBRD (www.406registration.com), select NEW REGISTRATION, and complete the online form. If the previous owner has registered the beacon but not changed its status in the IBRD, you will not be able to register the beacon.

To note that when a beacon has been sold and re-registered, the previous owner will not have access to any data anymore (i.e., the beacon account information is only available for the new owner).

Contact Details:

Address: Malta Communications Authority, Valletta Waterfront, Pinto Wharf,
Floriana FRN 1913, MALTA

Telephone: +356 21 336 840 Fax: +356 21 336 846

Web: <http://www.mca.org.mt> Email: info@mca.org.mt