



# Safety Alert

From the International Association of Drilling Contractors

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ALERT 01-08

## EPIRB OPERATIONAL MATTERS

While the incident detailed below is not directly related to the drilling or the oil and gas industries, this information may be of benefit to offshore drilling contractors and operators who have EPIRBs on board their liferafts.

### WHAT HAPPENED:

A French fishing vessel sank off the French Antilles in February 1999. There was a delay by the COSPAS-SARSAT system in locating the beacon used by the crew in a liferaft. An examination of the position location revealed that the beacon had initially been detected for a brief interval and thereafter not at all while on board the liferaft.

### WHAT CAUSED IT:

The question was thus raised as to whether there was any connection between the material used for the liferaft's construction and the malfunctioning of the beacon. The bottoms of liferafts of this type are reinforced with aluminum film to provide increased protection against moisture and the cold. A test was carried out to ascertain whether the aluminum film impairs the radio signal when a beacon is activated inside the liferaft. Four similar EPIRBs were activated over a 24-hour period, one on the top of a building, one in the water beside the liferaft, one inside on the bottom of the liferaft and one inside along the liferaft's vertical wall. The liferaft was kept at anchor in a bay throughout the test. As a result all the beacons, except the EPIRB positioned on the bottom of the liferaft, were correctly detected and located, several bursts having been received at the correct signal level (-112dBm).

### CORRECTIVE ACTIONS:

The test highlights the importance of the way in which an EPIRB on board a liferaft is used. It confirms that the correct position for the beacon should be:

- Either on the inside, in an upright position, with the antenna unobstructed;
- Or in the water, with a lanyard (see MSC/Circ.660) securing it to the liferaft.
- Users and manufacturers of EPIRBs should use these findings and take the appropriate measures to ensure that the EPIRB location in liferafts is such that the signal can be detected and located.

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**The Corrective Actions stated in this alert are one company's attempts to address the incident, and do not necessarily reflect the position of IADC or the IADC HSE Committee.**

This material is presented for information purposes only. Managers & Supervisors should evaluate this information to determine if it can be applied to their own situations and practices.  
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Issued March 2001