

For immediate release**WELCOME FROM UK POLICE FOR CHANGE IN BEACON LAW**

Police across the United Kingdom have welcomed the news that Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) can be legally used on land within the United Kingdom from today.

The change in the law could now help save lives on land across the UK, as well as reducing the risk to rescuers and mountain rescue teams.

When activated, the PLB transmits unique identification information, providing positional data and sends out a continuous homing transmission. This will help emergency services to locate casualties and has the potential to remove the need for lengthy, arduous and expensive search activity.

PLBs are expected to be used on land, primarily by those involved in recreational and outdoor activity. They may also be used by lone workers in occupations which may take them into rural areas.

When a member of the public purchases a new device, they are being urged to complete and return the free registration card to the address provided.

In a joint statement, and speaking on behalf of police forces in Scotland, England and Wales, Deputy Chief Constables Andy Cowie and Ian Shannon said:

“This legislative change will allow members of the public to use handheld PLB devices on land anywhere in the UK which when activated, will send a distress alert message that will be picked up by satellite and relayed via the UK Mission Control Centre (UKMCC) direct to the authorities.

“The UKMCC, co-located with the Air Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC), currently at RAF Kinloss, will receive, process and verify co-ordinates for activations before informing the relevant police force.

“The police service has been at the forefront, in planning these changes and colleagues in police forces across the UK are fully aware of the changes in legislation. We have worked with the Ministry of Defence, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the Department for Transport and OFCOM to get the necessary protocols in place to deal effectively with PLB activations.”

They continued:

“Mountain and lowland search and rescue teams are busy all year round and if we can take advantage of new technology to help manage and minimise the risk to rescuers and help speed up the rescue process in an emergency, there is no doubt that we can save lives which might otherwise have been lost.

“It will also help reduce the burden on volunteer rescue teams and searchers across the UK. Satellite coverage is much wider than mobile coverage and we have to take advantage of that.”

PLBs are already available for use in the aviation and maritime industries as part of the existing licensing and registration regime, regulated by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) on behalf of the Department for Transport.

NOTE TO NEWS EDITORS

Deputy Chief Constable Andy Cowie of Northern Constabulary is the ACPOS lead on Search and Rescue, while Deputy Chief Constable Ian Shannon of North Wales Police is the ACPO lead in England and Wales.

The police in the UK are the co-ordinating authority for all land-based search and rescue incidents. ACPOS and ACPO played a major role with other partners, in scoping and planning this change in legislation, after identifying the benefits the updated technology can bring.

More than 16,000 PLB devices have already been registered for civilian maritime and aviation use within the UK.

For the system to work smoothly, users must register their PLB in the UK or in their home country, using the registration card provided, giving details of a nominated person the Police can contact for further information, in the event of an alert on land. For example, that nominated person may be able to provide rescuers with details of any relevant medical conditions, clothing, equipment, number of people in the party or other important information.

PLBs come in two distinct types, with a variety of different manufacturers. The best type for the public to use is the 406 beacon-type, which sends out location information in its signal and can have its location fixed almost immediately and be accurate to a few metres. The other type, which is less helpful and less accurate, merely sends out a signal which has to be triangulated and this process can take hours and be accurate to a mile or less.

There are potential benefits for lone workers in forestry, estate workers, service engineers and those who go hill walking, trekking, climb mountains or even anglers or canoeists.

For Scotland specific enquiries, please contact ACPOS press office on 0141 435 1241.

The ACPO Press Office can be contacted via 020 7084 8946/47/48 (office hours) or via 07803 903686 (out of office hours).