



**ASSOCIATION OF  
CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS**

## **UNIFORMED OPERATIONS BUSINESS AREA**

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Not Protectively Marked

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Yes

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North Wales Police

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**TO: ALL CHIEF CONSTABLES AND COMMISSIONERS**

Dear Colleagues

### **PERSONAL LOCATOR BEACONS – AUTHORISED FOR USE ON LAND, FROM 12/01/2012**

I write to you as ACPO Lead on Search and Rescue to make forces aware that following a public consultation in 2011 and by use of a Statutory Instrument, the use of Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) will become legal on land from January 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.

As background, all UK Search and Rescue activity is covered by the UK Search and Rescue Strategic Framework Document (April 2008) to which both ACPO and ACPOS are party. The implications for the Police Service will arise from our designated responsibility as the coordinating authority for all land based Search and Rescue incidents. The primary Police point of contact for PLB activations will be your force control rooms. PLBs are expected to be used primarily by those engaged in recreational/sporting pursuits but also by lone workers in a variety of differing occupations. It is anticipated their use will potentially cut the response times for distress calls to remote or isolated locations by transmitting unique identification information, providing positional data and sending out a continuous homing transmission, thereby facilitating casualty location and negating the need for lengthy, arduous and expensive search activity.

The Police Service needs to be aware that these devices are now available for general use on land by the public and to recognise both the potential seriousness of distress activation and the resources available to assist in responding. When a member of the public purchases such a device in the UK, they will be strongly encouraged to return the free registration card though this is not a condition of sale or legal requirement.

PLBs, which are manually activated, are already commonly in use within the aviation and maritime industries as part of the existing licensing and registration regime, regulated by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on behalf of the Department for Transport. This legislative change will allow members of the public to use handheld PLB devices on land anywhere in the UK which when

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activated, will send a Distress Alert message that will be picked up by satellite and relayed via the United Kingdom Mission Control Centre (UKMCC) to the UK authorities. The UKMCC, co-located with the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC), currently at RAF Kinloss will receive process and verify co-ordinates for activations before informing the relevant Police Force.

Parallel contact will be made by the UKMCC / ARCC staff by telephone and fax on the priority numbers that your force control has made available to them and the explanatory header page, Distress Alert message details (including positional data interpretable by the Police), Emergency Point of Contact (EPOC) information and a concluding page with feedback requirements, will all be transferred by fax or e-mail (when the latter becomes available) as appropriate. It is therefore essential that your control room staff is familiar with the concept of PLBs and the UK MCC/ARCC's role and respond appropriately when contact is made. The UKMCC and ARCC will work with the force to give as accurate a location as possible and will update the control room should the device's position change or refine during the rescue operation. In return, they will ask for feedback from forces, including confirmation that the PLB has been switched off and how the rescue was concluded in order that the effectiveness of these devices and practices/procedures can be monitored and reviewed jointly with ACPO and ACPOS.

When a Search and Rescue incident is underway it will remain the relevant Police force's responsibility, as the designated coordinating authority, to identify the most appropriate assets to respond, whether this is a Police or volunteer rescue team and/or a Search and Rescue (SAR) Helicopter or other appropriate assets. Any request for SAR air support will still need to be made explicitly by your Force to the Duty Coordinator at the ARCC, as at present, even for incidents where the ARCC is in effect the informant. Assuming the device has been properly registered, the database details (held by MCA) accessed by UKMCC will be passed to the Police and should include name, address and contact details for the registrant and family/next of kin. If the UKMCC becomes aware of a false activation, these data will also be passed to the Police control room staff.

More than 16,000 devices have already been registered for civilian maritime and aviation use within the UK. PLBs are portable and, as with other technology, there is the potential for a device to be activated by malfunction in any Police area, at any time. It is assessed, following previous experience with PLBs at home and abroad, that there is no reason to expect any large increase in the number of activations, particularly in the period after use on land becomes legal. Misuse or abuse of these devices has also been considered by the UK PLB Working Group but the fact is that they remain relatively expensive to purchase at present and the Government have been bound by a long standing commitment and by international treaties, to regularise their use over land.

I therefore ask that you take appropriate action to ensure your force control rooms are aware of:

- (a) The possibility of being notified of an activation of a PLB in your force area and;
- (b) To ensure co-operation in supplying and keeping your UKMCC/ARCC priority telephone and facsimile line contact details up to date.

If colleagues are in any doubt of the process, procedure or SAR action being taken then contact can be made with the duty Mission Controller at RAF Kinloss or the Duty Watch Manager at Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre, Falmouth.

Further details on the technical and procedural aspects of PLB legislation can be obtained from my staff officer, Sgt Colm Mc Nelis via [colm.mcnelis@nthwales.pnn.police.uk](mailto:colm.mcnelis@nthwales.pnn.police.uk) or 01492 805 351.

Yours faithfully

**Ian Shannon**

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ACPO Lead for the Search & Rescue Working Group

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