



Personal Locator Beacons

Information for Colorado County Sheriffs

You may receive a notification of a PLB alert in your county!

What is a Personal Locator Beacon?

The PLB is a hand-held, satellite-communicating, emergency location device. They are similar to “ELTs” carried on aircraft and “EPIRBs” on boats. Their use became legal in the entire United States in July, 2003.

When activated, a PLB sends a data burst to passing satellites on 406 MHz; these are the same satellites that receive the well-known ELTs from crashed aircraft. The PLB simultaneously sends an emergency signal on 121.5 MHz for direction finding (DF). The data transmitted to the satellites includes a 15 digit unit registration number. Once picked up by the satellite system, the system generates the latitude and longitude of the source accurate to about 3 miles. Most new generation PLBs have a GPS receiver built-in, and will also transmit a GPS based location accurate to about 200'. All positions are reported in WGS 84 degrees, minutes, tenths of a minute to one decimal.

PLB Owner information

The owner **should** register the unit with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) when purchased. However, **many PLBs are unregistered**. The registration information includes the owner's name, address, phone number and backup phone number. This information is stored in a database, and is retrieved when the PLB is activated, but only if the owner registered the unit

Who gets the transmitted data?

The satellite stores the information until it is in range of a ground receiving station, which then relays the information to the NOAA. They process the

satellite data and transmit the results, along with the owner information, to the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC). The AFRCC sends the information to a point of contact in the state in which the PLB signal is located.

In Colorado, the POC is the Colorado Search and Rescue Board's on-duty **State SAR Coordinator**. The Coordinator will determine, by latitude and longitude, in which county the PLB alert originated and then contact the county sheriff's office. The Coordinator will not be able to tell you the nature of the emergency, only the PLB's location and (**if the PLB is registered**) the owner's name, address, phone number and backup phone number.

If a PLB goes off in my jurisdiction, what information will I get and what should I do?

A PLB activated in your area of responsibility usually means that a person is in distress and needs immediate assistance. 9-1-1 Centers need to treat this like any other SAR notification. Your first notification of the event will probably be a phone call from the State SAR Coordinator with the following information: *owner's name, address, phone number, emergency phone number and latitude and longitude of the signal*. Make sure dispatchers understand the nature of the phone call. **This is an emergency!** Treat this as all other SAR reports and notify the appropriate county SAR resources.

For further information about PLBs, contact the Colorado SAR Board. You may go to www.coloradoSARboard.org for current officers' and telephone numbers.

24 hour SAR Resource Assistance

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