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DIVE

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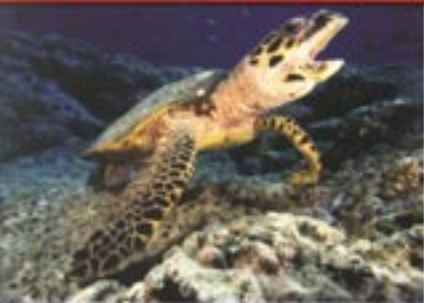
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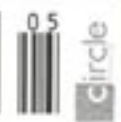
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EPIRB SMB

£195

Contact: Aqua Elevation 01795 521913

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EMERGENCY POSITION indicating radio beacons (EPIRB) are electronic devices that gives off a radio signal on the designated frequency of 406 MHz. This signal can be picked up by satellites, aircraft and the emergency search and rescue services. These EPIRBs are designed to be carried by vessels at sea and the great thing about them is that the signal can be detected virtually anywhere in the world. The problem, however, with these EPIRBs is that they tend to be bulky and can't be practically carried by an individual. So, could a smaller similar device be used by an individual? Well, yes. Companies such as Sea Marshall have developed a range of products that use the older technology transmitting on the 121.5MHz frequency. Often referred to as Personal Location Beacons (PLB), they have a much shorter range, typically up to 50 miles, but require a much smaller unit.

Aqua Elevation has taken this technology a step further and incorporated a waterproof Sea Marshall PLB into a delayed surface marker buoy (DSMB). Should divers become separated from their dive boat they can activate the PLB. The PLB broadcasts a radio signal which is repeated every three seconds and can be tracked by every plane and helicopter within 50 miles, or by boat within ten miles. The marker buoy variant is supposed to provide 40 per cent more efficient signal transmission. The average transmission period is 25 hours and the device has a depth rating of 100m.

So, does it work? We contacted the Penlee RNLI, currently based at Newlyn in Cornwall, for their assistance in finding out. To make the test more realistic we carried out the trial at night, so that the lifeboat could not see exactly where the transmission was coming from. We stationed our RIB and divers a couple of miles away and initiated the PLB while keeping in VHF radio



contact with the lifeboat. Within a few seconds of activating the PLB, the lifeboat crew reported that it had picked up a clear signal and confirmed the direction and approximate range it was coming from.

Neil Brockman, the skipper of the lifeboat, said he thought the devices were excellent and recommends that all divers carry one. 'Trying to find a diver can be extremely difficult,' he said, 'especially in poor visibility or choppy waters, but with this device they could home in on the signal very easily.'

While these PLBs don't replace the necessity for good boating and diving practice, should an emergency situation occur, your chances of being found are greatly increased by this device. **CH**

Note: EPIRBs are emergency devices and should only be used as such – they are not intended to be activated as a routine location unit. DIVE would like to thank the crew of the Penlee RNLI and Falmouth Coastguard for their assistance in carrying out this test.



VERDICT

Extremely effective safety device

Value: 7/10

Performance: 10/10