

CHALLENGER

Emergency survival beacons keep you in touch when disaster strikes!

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VENTURING INTO THE WILDERNESS OR ONTO THE WATER ALWAYS COMES WITH A RISK OF DISASTER. A WEATHER EVENT, a freak accident or even a criminal attack can turn a pleasurable adventure into a life-threatening nightmare. Outside the safety of more populated areas, calling 911 is simply not an option. When danger strikes away from civilization, having a distress beacon can mean the difference between a bad day and your last one.

Many who spend time in the outdoors consider distress radio beacons mandatory safety devices. Whether on a long wilderness hike or fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, being able to summon assistance in a crisis is critical to survival.

When activated, a distress radio beacon transmits a signal that can be detected by satellites. The signal information is then relayed to a center that coordinates a search-and-rescue response. Depending on the technology used in the beacon, the positioning of satellites and the location of the emergency, it could take several minutes to a couple of hours for a satellite to receive the distress signal and forward it to an emergency search-and-rescue center.

Some beacons only provide an automated emergency signal, while others incorporate other functions that enhance the user's general capabilities in the outdoors. When buying a distress beacon, carefully consider your needs and find the unit that will best serve you. The following are five different devices to consider.



ACR RESQLINK

ACR Electronics makes a number of waterproof personal locator beacon (PLB) devices that are great for anyone spending time on the water, as well as hunters, hikers and campers. The ResQLink PLB is lightweight—only 4.6 ounces—and smaller than most smartphones. A built-in strobe light will also help rescuers find you during a nighttime search. Similarly, the ResQLink+ PLB is a solid choice for anyone who spends a lot of time on the water, as the unit is buoyant in addition to being waterproof.

(acrartex.com; 800-432-0227)



Photos Courtesy Manufacturers



BRIARTEK CERBERUS

Most rescue beacons offer only a way to send out a distress signal, but the BriarTek Cerberus system adds the ability of two-way text messaging through a connected smartphone. In a non-emergency this is a convenience. In an emergency, however, you can give rescuers detailed information about your situation and location. Additionally, the system can alert you to any dangerous weather conditions, geo-political events or other hazards that may appear in your area. The Cerberus system also tracks you via GPS, allowing you, family members and rescuers to see exactly where you are and where you've been. (cerberus.briartek.com; 703-548-7892)



MCMURDO FAST FIND 220

A handheld unit, the McMurdo Fast Find 220 is a lightweight, waterproof rescue beacon that can be used on land or at sea. An antenna is securely stored to prevent damage when handled, but deploys quickly when activated. The Fast Find 220 comes with a buoyancy pouch that will keep the device afloat. A bright LED emits an SOS signal that can also help rescuers locate you in dark or low-light conditions. (mcmurdomarine.com)



SPOT GEN3

The SPOT Gen3 adds custom messaging and GPS tracking features to the unit's fundamental ability to call for assistance in an emergency. In conjunction with Google Maps, the SPOT Gen3 will regularly update your location so that family members or rescue workers can track your progress. Rescue assistance can be summoned through the use of an easily accessible button; a second button can be used to summon non-emergency assistance. The company even offers very affordable search-and-rescue insurance. Weighing only 4 ounces, the device runs off of four AAA batteries. (findmespot.com; 866-651-7768)