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To allow a fuller understanding of the switch off of 121.5Mhz, it is important to look at the availability of satellites through until 2008/2009. Effectively there are only two or three satellites available from the original six minimum namely C11, S10 and S11.

Currently we still have C09, S09 and S10 but S09 is due to drop out shortly. As a consequence of these reduced satellites, the coverage time in New Zealand coastal and inshore search area is reduced to:

**A two hourly average time between satellites passes with three satellites in orbit**

**A three hourly average time between satellites passes with two satellites in orbit**

The pictures clearly indicate the coverage. Because the New Zealand Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) need two satellite passes to get a reasonable idea of location of a 121.5MHz activation, the net affect will be a 4-hour delay with three satellites in orbit and a 6-hour delay with only two satellites orbiting.

The practical use of any 121.5MHz beacon relying on satellites from next year (2006) is therefore highly questionable. If you happen to be in the water, you are likely to be deceased before anyone will find you.

The drop off the Cospas-sarsat satellites of the 121.5MHz signal was flagged in 1999 so it has been scheduled for some time. The NZ Government is about to launch an advertising campaign to "Switch to 406" so my suggestion is do not wait until February 2009 but make the switch NOW or when the battery in your existing unit is due for renewal. New 406MHz EPIRBs that replace the older analogue style start at less than \$699.00 including GST (down in price from \$2000.00) so there is no excuse to not upgrade. The 406MHz unit once registered will inform RCC whom the EPIRB, ELT or PLB belongs to and provide an accuracy of less than one square mile versus 1200 square miles.

Lloyd Klee of Safety At Sea Ltd is the NZ Marine representative for the Joint Australian New Zealand EPIRB standard

