
**Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness
Committee**

HB 2619

Brief Description: Requiring the use of electronic signaling devices in certain conditions.

Sponsors: Representatives Liias, Roberts, Moeller, Simpson, McCoy, Jacks, Williams, Goodman and Appleton.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires a person who engages in mountain climbing or takes organized groups mountain climbing to carry an electronic signaling device.

Hearing Date: 1/26/10

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

An electronic signaling device is a distress beacon that can be manually or automatically activated to transmit a distress signal to a satellite. They are often used to help pinpoint the exact location of a person.

A personal locator beacon (PLB), often used by climbers and hikers, is a portable transmitter that sends out a personalized emergency distress signal to a person's nearest rescue services. The PLBs are part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Search and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking (SARSAT) system. When an individual (or group) is in distress, activating a PLB results in a signal being transmitted. The distress signal is received by the SARSAT system which uses NOAA satellites in low-earth and geostationary orbits to detect and locate the source of the signal.

Encoded in the transmitted signal is a serial number which is used to determine the registered owner of the PLB device. Some models of PLBs include and/or allow a global positioning

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system (GPS) module. The GPS module is able to determine the PLB location by acquiring information from GPS satellites. Once the position is acquired using GPS satellites, the position coordinates are transmitted as part of the PLB signal thereby providing position information within minutes. With the GPS information included in the transmission, the beacon's location can be determined within feet instead of miles.

In addition to the distress signal transmitted to satellites, the PLB devices also transmit a homing signal that is used by search and rescue teams to locate the person in distress once they get close to the location provided by the SARSAT system.

Summary of Bill:

Electronic signaling devices are defined as including: emergency locator transmitters, emergency position indicating radio beacons, and PLBs.

During the months of November through March, any person that engages in mountain climbing must use an electronic signaling device when climbing a mountain above the timberline. A compensated guide that takes any organized group that includes children mountain climbing above the timberline must carry an altimeter, an electronic signaling device, a contour map of the area, and a compass.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.