

1 PERSONAL LOCATOR BEACONS (PLB)

9.1 Summary

- It is compulsory to carry a personal locator beacon (PLB) on all club trips unless the trip leader has determined that mobile phone coverage is available during the time of the trip—and that a party member is carrying a working mobile phone.
- PLBs may be activated in situations of grave and imminent danger, immobilisation due to injury or illness, or serious delay (refer to section 9.3 below). However, each situation is different and the trip leader should decide what is best for the particular circumstances, and discuss this with the rest of the group, particularly experienced trampers. The basic rule is “if in doubt, get them out”.
- While the decision to activate a PLB will be made by the trip leader, he or she should consult with others in the group, particularly other experienced trampers. If the trip leader is incapacitated, the person who has assumed the leader’s role will make the decision in conjunction with others on the trip.
- If a PLB is negligently activated outside the criteria in 3 below then, at the discretion of the committee, the person responsible for the activation may be held liable for any costs associated with getting the PLB checked and the battery replaced, or purchasing a replacement PLB.

9.2 Personal Locator Beacons

- WTMC owns a number of PLBs. These are kept in the club gear lockers and are available for use on club trips along with other club gear.
- It is compulsory to carry a personal locator beacon (PLB) on all club trips, unless the trip leader has determined that mobile phone coverage is available during the time of the trip and that a party member is carrying a working mobile.
- We expect all club gear to be treated with care. PLBs may not function as intended if mistreated, and additionally they are a particularly expensive piece of equipment.
- A PLB is not a substitute for thorough trip planning and execution. The club expects all trip leaders and club trip participants to abide by the club’s policies and procedures relating to club trips (these are available on the WTMC website www.wtmc.org.nz). Our policies and procedures are designed to keep trip participants safe and are consistent with the principles set out in the NZ Mountain Safety Council Outdoor Safety Code:
 - Plan your trip
 - Seek local knowledge. Plan the route you will take and the amount of time you can reasonably expect it to take
 - Tell someone your plans and leave a date for when to raise the alarm if you haven’t returned (see club procedures for club contact people)
 - Be aware of the weather. NZ weather can be highly unpredictable. Check the forecast and expect sudden weather changes

- o Know your limits
- o Challenge yourself within your physical limits and experience (WTMC grades its trips to help you decide which trip is suitable for you)
- o Take sufficient supplies
- o Make sure you have enough food, equipment and emergency rations for the worst case scenario. Take an appropriate means of communication. In some circumstances mobile phone coverage is available, for longer trips to remote areas hiring a mountain radio is an option <http://www.mountainradio.co.nz/bookings.html> (South Island) <http://www.wmrs.org.nz/wmrsfaq.htm> (Wellington).

9.3 When to activate a PLB

- PLBs should be activated in the following situations:
 - o There is grave or imminent danger to a member(s) of the tramping party or others encountered in the backcountry. Examples would be a major injury to a party member, or a party that has become dangerously trapped by rising floodwaters.
 - o A member(s) of the tramping party has become injured or unwell and will not be able to walk out. In these situations, consideration should be given to the timing of beacon activation; if they are not in danger of immediate harm or the situation worsening (e.g. by going into shock) waiting until daylight/improved weather may be recommended. Conversely, if there is the possibility for the situation to worsen during the night, activating the PLB while it is still light may be more appropriate than waiting to see if the situation resolves.
 - o Your tramping party is overdue to the extent that a search will be certainly launched for you (usually at least more than one night overdue). Note that being late out does not, in most circumstances, constitute a life-threatening situation. There is a club emergency contact system in place to deal with instances when a trip is overdue.

However, each situation is different and the trip leader should decide what is best for the particular circumstances, and discuss this with the rest of the group, particularly experienced trampers. The basic rule is “if in doubt, get them out”.

- Before activating a PLB consider whether a mobile phone call to 111 is a practical option. If you are able to talk to the Police you will be able to provide context and receive advice.

9.4 What to do when you have decided to activate a PLB

- Activate the PLB following the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Position your beacon in a clear and open area, pointing the aerial vertically towards the sky, away from trees, buildings and mountains.
- While waiting for rescue you should look after injured person(s) and attempt to make the party as safe and comfortable as possible.

- Give consideration to clearing a helicopter landing site if possible, and making yourself visible with smoke, flares, reflectors, lights pointed downwards, bright colours or shaking trees.
- Take steps to ensure the wellbeing of all members of the tramping party; if the weather is poor, a helicopter may not be able to reach you, and you may have to wait until a Land Search and Rescue team can walk in to you.
- If a PLB is inadvertently activated, or it is activated and then decided it was not necessary to do so, **do not** deactivate it. If the signal from a PLB disappears a search will still be launched and it is preferable for SAR personnel to be able to track an actively transmitting beacon than have to search a wider general area.
- If a PLB is activated the trip leader (or leader's delegate) must inform the club contact person when the group is safe, as soon as is realistically possible, and then provide a full written account of the incident to the Chief Guide.

9.5 Care of PLB

- The Emergency Contact Coordinator is responsible for maintaining club PLBs, including checking their working condition, replacing batteries before expiration and ensuring registration and contact details are up to date.
- Generally the trip leader is responsible for looking after the PLB during the trip.
- The trip leader must agree to abide by this PLB policy.
- If the PLB is activated, damaged, destroyed, lost or stolen the trip leader is responsible for notifying the Gear Custodian and the Chief Guide or Assistant Chief Guide as soon as possible. If the trip leader is unable to do so another member of the party should do so.
- If the PLB is activated in a manner consistent with this policy, the club will meet the cost of getting the PLB checked and any battery replacement.
- If the PLB is damaged, destroyed, lost or stolen through an act of negligence, the committee has the discretion to determine whether the trip leader or other accountable person shall be responsible for paying for the PLB to be replaced by an equivalent make/model.
- The trip leader must return the PLB on the date indicated to the Gear Custodian or their delegate. This will usually be the Wednesday evening following the end of the trip.
- If the PLB is not returned on the date specified the Committee reserves the right to charge the trip leader a late fee. This fee is to cover the cost of the club having to hire a replacement PLB to cover trips until the PLB is returned.

9.6 When a personal PLB is substituted for a club PLB

- A personal PLB can only be taken instead of a club PLB if the trip leader agrees and the PLB owner:
 - agrees to abide by the WTMC PLB policy; and

- o advises the club emergency contact person that the PLB is theirs and that it has been registered with RCCNZ; and
- o temporarily add the club's emergency contact as their #1 listed emergency contact, which can be done [online](#).
- If the conditions above are satisfied and a personal PLB is activated in accordance with the WTMC PLB policy or damaged, destroyed, lost or stolen, the PLB owner may request that the Committee, at its discretion, approve the cost of having the personal PLB checked and its battery replaced or replacement cost as appropriate.

9.7 When a personal PLB is additional to a club PLB

- If you are taking a personal PLB in addition to a club PLB on a club trip you should:
 - o Ensure it is registered with RCCNZ; and
 - o advise the trip leader so they can include this fact in the trip plan; and
 - o temporarily add the club's emergency contact as their #1 listed emergency contact, which can be done [online](#).
- If your PLB is activated in accordance with the WTMC PLB policy you may request that the Committee, at its discretion, approve the cost of having your personal PLB checked and its battery replaced
- The club will not meet the cost of replacing an additional PLB on club trips in circumstances where it is damaged, destroyed, lost or stolen.

9.8 Use of WTMC Personal Locator Beacons on Private Trips

- club PLBs are not to be taken on private trips. PLBs are available for hire from various sources including many local outdoor shops (see the Beacons.org.nz website for a full list of hire locations).

9.9 Review of PLB policy

- This policy for use of WTMC Personal Locator Beacons on WTMC trips will be reviewed by the committee after any PLB activation.