

AOPA

Pilots need a clear signal on ELTs

By AOPA ePublishing staff

U.S. aircraft owners are stuck in the middle, so to speak, of three different stances from the United States, Canada, and Mexico on whether to mandate that aircraft be equipped with 406-MHz ELTs.

Currently, the FAA is not planning to mandate the 406-MHz ELT. Canada and Mexico plan to require the unit, although Mexico has agreed to an alternative for U.S.-registered aircraft. AOPA opposes any mandate for the 406-MHz ELT, believing that the option should be left to pilots.

The issue is heightened because satellites will stop monitoring 121.5 MHz, which most ELTs transmit, on Feb. 1, 2009. Recently, U.S. aircraft owners received postcards from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that recommends switching to the 406-MHz ELT before that date. The NOAA effort is just a recommendation, not a requirement. AOPA has been effective in preventing an FAA mandate for the 406-MHz ELT. The 121.5-MHz ELTs will still work after that date, and ATC and pilots will continue to monitor 121.5 MHz for distress calls.

"Members do not need to switch ELTs if they fly in the United States," said Rob Hackman, AOPA senior director of regulatory affairs. "But if they fly internationally to Mexico or Canada, they will need to equip appropriately based on the individual country's requirement."

A basic 406-MHz ELT starts at about \$900 but increases with the level of sophistication and cost of installation in the aircraft. Because of the expense, AOPA is recommending alternatives to Canada and Mexico that would allow U.S. pilots to carry a more affordable device on board the aircraft.

Mexico's stance on ELTs

AOPA has worked with the FAA equivalent in Mexico to offer an alternative to equipping U.S. aircraft in Mexico with a 406-MHz ELT. Mexican officials have indicated that a U.S. aircraft using an automatic portable 406-MHz ELT that has a technical standard order authorization could meet the requirements of the regulation. However, the association continues to work on other possible alternatives.

Pilots operating U.S. aircraft would need to have the automatic portable 406-MHz ELT on board for all flights in Mexico starting July 1, 2009.

Canada's stance on ELTs

Canada is currently [proposing to mandate the switch](#) by Feb. 1, 2009. Under the current proposal, any aircraft, regardless of the country of registry, would need to have a 406-MHz ELT installed on board in order to enter Canadian airspace. Under the current proposal, portable 406-MHz ELTs and personal locator beacons could not be used in lieu of an installed 406-MHz ELT.

"AOPA members who fly to Canada need to weigh in on this proposal," Hackman said.

Pilots are encouraged to explain how the rule would affect the frequency of their flights into Canada, the financial impact fewer flights would have on Canadian communities near airports, and alternatives to carrying the 406-MHz ELT.

"AOPA opposes any attempt to mandate 406-MHz ELTs," Hackman explained. "We recognize the benefits that can be derived from the advanced ELTs available today, but the benefits must be balanced against cost and the needs of individual aircraft owners. Pilots are in the best position to weigh the pros and cons of the new equipment based on the type and location of the flying they do and equipment they carry. That's why we only support equipping with more advanced ELTs on a voluntary basis."

Pilots can send comments on the Canadian proposal by Oct. 23 to:

Chief, Regulatory Affairs (AARBH)
Civil Aviation, Safety and Security Group
Department of Transport



Place de Ville, Tower C
330 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N5

In your comments, cite "*Canada Gazette*, Part I, July 28, 2008."

You can also send your comments [via e-mail](#). Specify "To the Civil Aviation Regulatory Affairs Division" in the salutation.

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