

MOB Rescue Systems: A Field Divided

The test products were divided into distinct categories that are representative of what's on the market today. These include overboard alarms, beacons with direction-finding (DF) capability, U.S. Coast Guard/internationally monitored satellite beacons, and satellite personal-messenger devices.

The Alert2 and Sea Marshall systems incorporate both overboard alarms and direction-finding capability. They were tested aboard a 41-foot-sloop in order to evaluate the effect of electro-magnetic interference from alternators, SSB, and VHF radios. A comparison was made doing the same DF testing in a small fiberglass dinghy with no mechanical propulsion system or other sources of spurious RF energy. Both units fared well in this evaluation, but the higher-mounted Sea Marshall antenna did provide a greater range (1.6 miles), and its fixed visual display was easier to use.

The overboard alarm-only devices (LifeTag and MOBi-lert) were put through actual victim-in-the-water testing in controlled situations that gave testers a chance to measure the lag time between an MOB hitting the water and the actual alarm function. Both units also have the ability to be networked with GPS/digital chart systems, and this feature was also tested on the water.

The two satellite systems, ACR ResQ-Fix and Spot, were inspected and their network of satellite coverage noted. Both units were put through their self-check routines and evaluated as to portability, case construction, and operability.

In a night test, we compared the DF and digital chart/GPS-linked alarms, and within a ¼-mile range, we tested these units against a bright strobe light-equipped victim. The latter proved much preferable in close quarters situations.



Veteran PS electronics tester Al Herum installed the MOBi-lert and Raymarine LifeTag systems for on-the-water testing.