



SAFETY ALERT

PLB Awareness

Name:

Date Read:

WHAT HAPPENED

A worker with many decades of experience on a sheep and beef property took his quad bike out to a far paddock on a Saturday morning, searching for a missing dog. A moment of inattention took him off the hard track and the bike got stuck in soft ground. With the farm's managers away, he decided to sort it out himself rather than call for help – he had no phone with him, and had left his radio behind because he wasn't officially working that day.

After walking to the shed and back for a spade and wearing himself out trying to dig the bike free, the evening cold set in, with hypothermia likely reducing his ability to think clearly and make safe decisions. He was carrying a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) but didn't activate it. With no one expecting him back, it was hours before the alarm was raised. A large search – family, neighbours, Police, and the Eagle helicopter – went through the night as temperatures fell to around -5°C. He was found alive the next morning, severely hypothermic, after a night spent exposed to freezing conditions.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN

Not wanting to bother anyone stopped him calling for help when the bike first got stuck – at the point it would have made the biggest difference. He later explained, "I didn't pull the PLB because I wasn't lost." It's a common misunderstanding: a PLB isn't only for when you don't know where you are, it's for any situation where you're stuck, injured, or unsure whether you can get home safely. The physical effort of digging out the bike alone also left him exhausted, making him far more vulnerable to the dropping overnight temperatures.

KEY LESSONS

- Call for help the moment things go wrong. Getting stuck is not a failure a short, awkward phone call beats a night exposed to the elements.
- Activate your PLB if you're stuck, injured, or unsure whether you can get home safely, not only if you're lost. It won't trigger an automatic helicopter callout – the response is scaled to what's needed, and your registered contact is usually called first.
- Make sure every worker understands when and how to use their PLB.
- Set up a check-in system for anyone working alone, with a clear process for who to call if a check-in is missed.
- Name a stand-in point of contact whenever the owner or manager is away, so "they're away" never becomes a reason to handle a problem alone.
- Check your PLB's battery is current – it only works if it's ready to go.
- Let your team know when you need help. Working alone doesn't mean you're on your own, and they're there to back you up.



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