

SPOT - A NEW SAFETY SERVICE

How many times during a boat cruise, backcountry hike or other trip away from civilization, have you wanted to send word to your family or friends that you're okay, but had no VHF or cell phone coverage? That service is now available, at a reasonable cost, through the miracle of satellites. It's called SPOT and it works anywhere on earth.

SPOT is a portable, waterproof, 7-oz. transponder which monitors your location with GPS, then transmits it by satellite via Globalstar sat-phone to a monitoring center. From there, an "I'm OK" message can be sent by email to up to ten addressees on your contact list, or a "Need Help" message can be activated. There's even a continuous tracking feature linked to Google Maps that allows your contacts to follow your progress in real time.

The transponder requires only a clear view of the sky. There is no confirmation at the unit that the transmission made it through, so repeating an "I'm OK" transmission two or three times an hour is advisable. Your contacts will only receive one "I'm OK" message if your position hasn't changed. Globalstar has 48 LEO (low earth orbit) satellites in its constellation, about double that of GPS, so service is pretty reliable.

A SPOT transponder costs \$169 and has several level-of-service options.

- The basic package allows you to send an "I'm OK" message by pushing a button, plus the ability to ask friends for non-life-threatening help or to send life-saving help requests to the proper authorities in an emergency. There are two replaceable lithium-ion batteries which will support about 1,500 transmissions of this type. Add \$100 annually.
- A second option sends a continuous "I'm OK" signal, linked to a Google Maps overlay on the Internet, to provide constant tracking. Note that battery life is shortened to about two weeks with this option. Add \$50 annually.
- Another upgrade benefit provides for an additional \$100,000 of search and rescue resources, underwritten by Lloyd's of London. Cost is \$8 annually if purchased with original unit.

The SPOT transponder can be carried with you anywhere, moving from boat, to RV, to backpack. Given the reasonable initial price and the basic monthly cost of less than \$10, no traveler off the beaten path should be without one.

SPOT's website for more details: www.findmespot.com

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