

Be ready; suit up for survival

Since we are heading into the cold weather season again, this FISH SAFE column provides a review of survival suit care and preparations for its use along with a step-by-step checklist.

Regulations regarding survival suit requirements are complex. For the purposes of this column, we will work from the premise that the US Coast Guard currently requires survival suits for each crew person on every commercial fishing vessel operating in offshore waters.

National Coast Guard data show that there are two major types of incidents in which fishermen find themselves in the water: flooding/sinking and capsizing; and falls overboard.

Survival suits are the safety gear that can be useful in flooding/sinking incidents. Many capsizing accidents happen too quickly to afford fishermen the time to get into their suits and falls overboard offer no time.

Regardless of whether a vessel is required to have survival suits for all crew, all fishermen should have a suit. Many, however, are not experienced in how to use a suit effectively. When asked during voluntary dockside inspections by Coast Guard marine safety officers, crewmembers and captains alike all too often reply that they have not tried their suits on or performed an immersion drill.

Familiarity with the suit is key to

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Theresa Dolloff graphic

survival. The usefulness of a suit in an emergency is directly related to the condition of the suit, the fisherman's ability to put it on quickly and completely, and his/her ability to transfer to a raft or jump overboard and clear the vessel safely.

The accompanying checklist was developed for this FISH SAFE column from information provided by the US Coast Guard, the Workers' Compensation Board in Ontario, Canada, and a suit manufacturer. We welcome comments to improve the checklist to ensure safety. ■

Suit-up for Survival Checklist

PURCHASE AND STORAGE

- Suits purchased are correct size.
- Zipper is lubricated with beeswax based lubricant, not petroleum product.
- Zipper works easily over full range.
- Suit has not been dried in sun.
- Suit is in bag and accessible.
- Suit is stored dry and away from solvents and petroleum.

IMMERSION DRILL

- Don suit and hood.
- Zip up completely.
- Affix face mask.
- Use proper jump-in technique:

- In-board hand over head;
- Out-board hand over face and nose;
- Jump-in legs crossed; and
- Jump-in on leeward side.
- Check for major and pin-hole leaks in suit.
- Use survival swimming techniques:
 - Open face mask;
 - Inflate pillow;
 - Burp suit legs by bending knees;
 - Demonstrate conserving energy and heat with arms across chest and knees tucked (HELP position);
 - Demonstrate arms-holding-

- knees human chain to keep swimmers together and move to new location while conserving energy; and
- Demonstrate head-to-toe human float to keep swimmers together and increase visibility for rescuers.

SUMMARY

- Captain and all crew are aware of the location of suits.
- Suits are stored properly.
- Captain and all crew have successfully demonstrated

- immersion skills through immersion drills in their suits.
- A drill was conducted at the beginning of the fishing season.
- Periodic drills were conducted during the fishing season and/or when new crew arrived.
- All drills and results were logged with date.
- All deficiencies were noted with date.
- All deficiencies were corrected and logged with date.
- As captain, I certify that my crew and I have successfully demonstrated proper suit storage and immersion skills.

Some Lucky Fisherman is Going to Leave FISH EXPO ATLANTIC With A Truckload of Great Stuff!



Elmo,
We're not supposed to be