



Cold Water, Immersion Suits, and Survivability

Most people are aware that being exposed to cold water without protection can lead to hypothermia because the loss of heat from your body will occur so rapidly. You must be prepared to protect yourself from exposure, and also the shock to your body from entry into cold water. Immersion suits provide this protection.

“Cold Water” is defined in the law and regulations, and is discussed in numerous publications. The accepted critical water temperature is 59°F. To the unprotected person, water at this temperature or colder is painful upon entry. Protective equipment will enhance your time to be rescued and survive in cold water.



Immersion suits are required on commercial fishing industry vessels operating in Cold Water. Specifically, that is beyond the Boundary Line north of 32°N latitude and on Lake Superior for documented vessels. All vessels operating in Coastal Waters on the West Coast of the U.S north of Point Reyes, CA, beyond Coastal Waters in cold water, and on Lake Superior must carry immersion suits.

The Coast Guard’s Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) No. 7-91 entitled “Determination of Cold Water Areas.” provides descriptions and maps of “seasonally” cold water areas for the U.S. Here is an example for the month of May along the East Coast of the U.S.

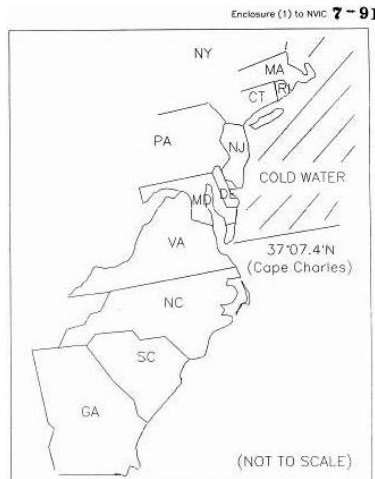
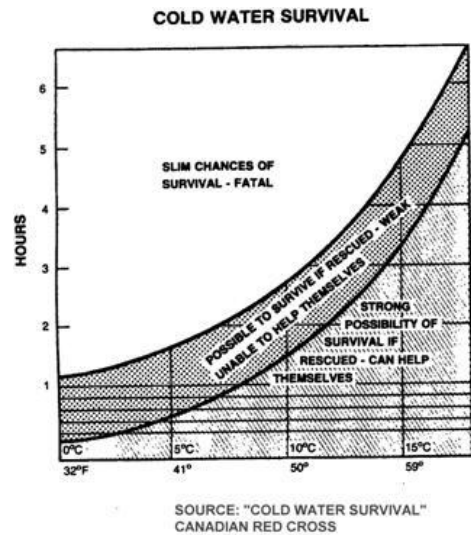


Figure 5. May – Atlantic Ocean

Complimenting your immersion suit, is an inflatable liferaft or other survival craft. If you have to abandon ship, you would like to enter a survival craft dry. Even if you enter a survival craft wet, your body will stay warmer if you remained out of the water. This is true even without an immersion suit.



Stranded in water, with or without an immersion suit, take action and follow techniques to increase survival time. Remain calm and don’t swim aimlessly. Stay with other survivors and huddle together. If alone, use the Heat Escape Lessening Position (HELP) to help protect critical body areas and slow down heat loss. See below.



Train to respond in an emergency and know how to use survival equipment. Safety orientation, instructions, and drills are required on documented vessels operating beyond the Boundary Line or with more than 16 POB. Survivors will confirm that training and drills will help save your life and the lives of others. You have to know what to do in an emergency. **Practice To Survive!**

For more safety information or to view other references, visit our Web Site at www.FishSafe.info.