



## Immersion Suits

Every commercial fishing vessel must carry an immersion suit for each crew member. An immersion suit is designed to save your life if you are forced to abandon ship into the cold waters of B.C. Cold water is defined as water below 25°C but the greatest effects occur below 15°C. Coastal waters in B.C. are usually below 15°C. Without protection, people can drown within a few minutes from the shock of entering cold water unexpectedly. Even if they survive the initial shock, they soon lose the ability to swim and keep their head above water.

### Advantages of an immersion suit

An approved immersion suit keeps you afloat, keeps your body heat inside the suit, and keeps water out. It covers all your body but your face. The hood forms a seal around your face to keep water out. A flap may cover your mouth and nose. The zipper and seams do not allow water to seep in. It is very important to keep out cold water that could cool your body because you could be in the water for hours before being rescued.

An immersion suit acts like your own personal life raft. Its bright colour provides a large target for rescuers to see.

Some newer immersion suits are made of a flexible material that allows crew members to move more easily. If the ship is in danger, crew can put on immersion suits and still perform emergency tasks and handle lines. If crew members wait until the last minute to put on their suits, they may have no time if the ship suddenly capsizes.

### Taking care of your immersion suit

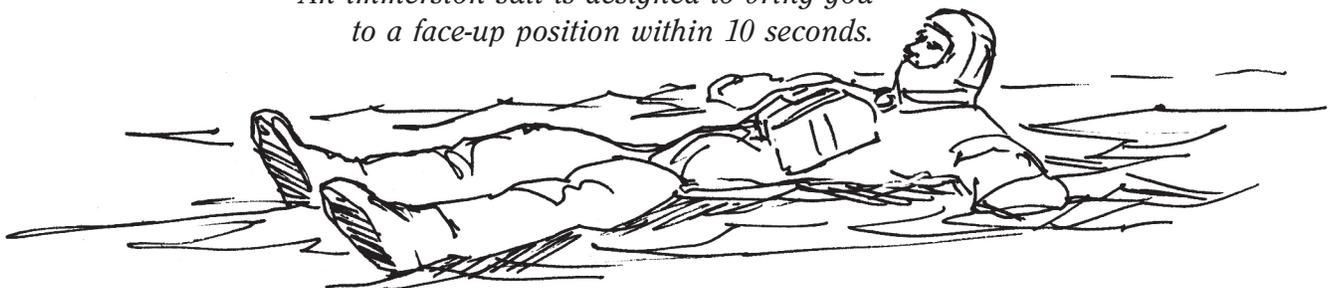
Regularly inspect your immersion suit to make sure it is in good working condition:

- Examine the suit for rips, tears, and deterioration. Repairs should be made by the manufacturer or someone competent in immersion suit repairs.
- Make sure the zipper works smoothly. Check that the teeth are aligned. Wax the front and back of the zipper with beeswax or paraffin wax. Do not use a petroleum-based product as this can break down the fabric and water could enter.
- If your suit has a back pillow, at least once a year manually blow up the pillow to make sure it inflates fully and remains inflated for 24 hours. This pillow will keep your shoulders and head out of water. You need to ensure that you can inflate it manually in case the automatic inflation system fails.
- Check that the reflective tape is in place.
- Check that the whistle works. The whistle is usually attached to the zipper or is on a lanyard in the front pocket.
- Check that the light is attached and that the battery is not past the manufacturer's expiry date. The light is activated by salt water.

Store the suit in a dry place where it is out of direct sunlight and easy to get if you must abandon ship. Fold it up according to the manufacturer's instructions. If the suit has been immersed in salt water, thoroughly rinse and dry it before storing it.

Make sure your immersion suit has Canadian Coast Guard approval.

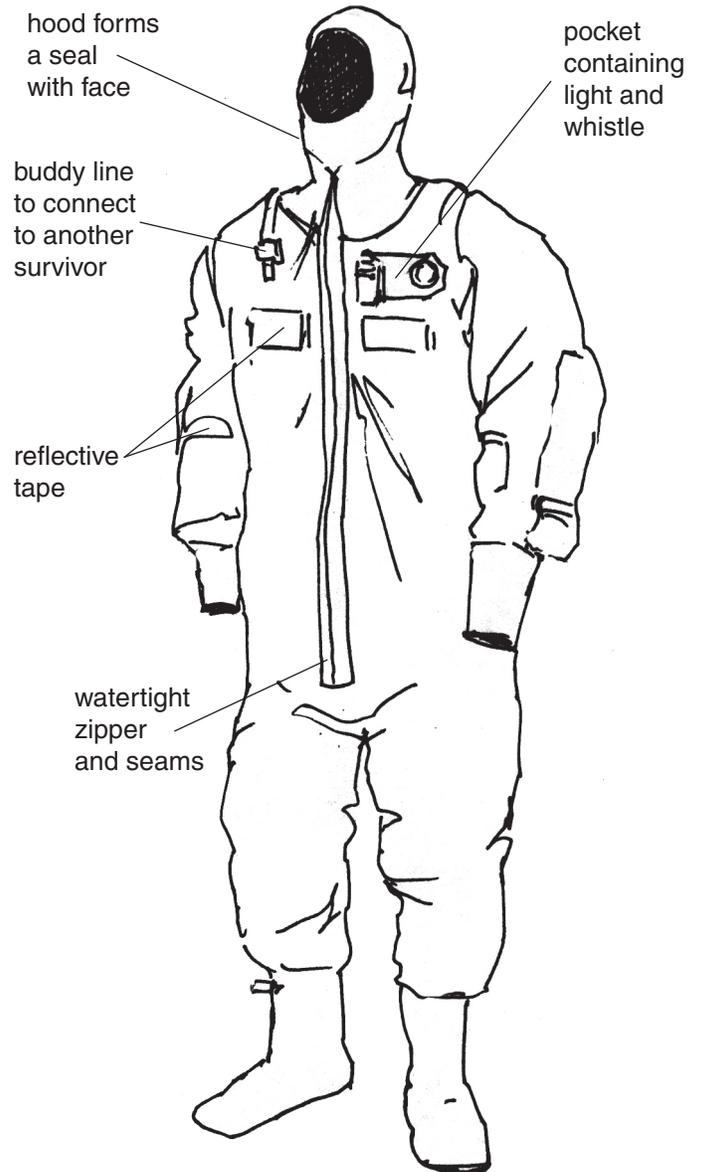
*An immersion suit is designed to bring you to a face-up position within 10 seconds.*



## Emergency drills

The master must conduct emergency drills at the start of the fishing season, when there is a crew change, and at intervals to ensure that crew members are familiar with emergency procedures. These include procedures for putting on immersion suits. In an emergency, you may need to put on your suit in darkness and rough seas with the vessel listing badly so it is important to practise getting your suit from storage and then putting it on within one minute.

For more information on the hazards of cold water immersion, see *WorkSafe Bulletin* WS 04-01 "Cold Water Immersion" on the WorkSafeBC web site [www.WorkSafebc.com](http://www.WorkSafebc.com).



*The features on an immersion suit vary according to the model, but they all keep the water out, provide insulation, and keep the body afloat.*

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