



The Mustang Ocean Commander offers a better seal at the hood.

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Dry Suits as Safety Items?

To see how a dry suit augmented with a neoprene hood, wetsuit gloves, and a PFD compared with the survival suits we reviewed in July 2007, *PS* testers plunged into the icy, 35-degree waters of Chesapeake Bay while wearing the Gill dry suit. Although by no means a direct substitute for a survival suit in extreme conditions, the ensemble can be very useful aboard a boat that cruises or races in higher latitudes. And because a drysuit can serve many other purposes, even cold-climate cruisers on tight budgets might consider it a cost-effective way to improve safety at sea.

The same logic that leads us to switch to storm sails when conditions deteriorate should apply to clothing as well. In many respects, a drysuit offers a better choice than foul-weather gear for extreme conditions. Cold and wet crew suffer fatigue sooner, and a well-made drysuit keeps the body drier and warmer than conventional foul weather gear.

In a capsized or crew overboard incident, a dry suit will improve the odds of survival by keeping the wearer warm and dry in the water. Like foul-weather gear, it can be worn comfortably with a Type III or inflatable PFD over the suit.

Bottom line: If a survival suit doesn't fit into your priorities, those sailing in colder waters should take a serious look at the drysuit option.