



# HYPOTHERMIA

November, 2004

Already, we are enjoying a glorious season on our home river! Old friends are seen again, and new boaters finally get to test their new found skills on the St. Francis.

We all need to be aware of the dangers of hypothermia, and to know the warning signs so we may help others around us.

Newer boaters often do not dress properly, and have miserably cold days on the river. There are numerous websites that offer advice on what to wear, but a few basics are:

- Thin wicking layers under a dry suit help pull moisture away from your skin, but are less effective at providing an insulating layer preventing heat loss.
- Fleece or similar synthetic insulating layers that have loft are needed to prevent heat loss through conduction. Even though the dry suit/top prevents water from actually touching the skin, heat transfer occurs easily through the damp layers. The loft of an insulating layer makes an airspace that acts as a roadblock to heat exchange.
- A windproof paddling top over a wetsuit can drastically reduce heat loss as well.
- Remember, cotton kills. So, make sure your layers are either made of wool or some synthetic fibers, such as polyester, nylon, or polypropylene. Cotton will suck heat away from your body 5 times faster when wet, while fleece will retain warmth when wet.
- A skull cap can help regulate heat loss through your head and prevent cold ears, they are cheap insurance against a miserably cold day on the river.

We have all heard the advice that we should dress for a swim. However, many change their habits when they stop swimming often. It is worth noting that you are not necessarily dressing for YOUR swim, you may be dressing for somebody else's. Rescue situations frequently require emersion by the rescuers. How long can you stay effective with shorts on in the water on a cold day?

Similarly, pogies are loved by many boaters when the temperature drops, but how long can you stay effective without them on? In a rescue situation, hand and finger dexterity are vital. A cheap pair of neoprene gloves next to a water bottle in your boat are never a bad idea if you wear pogies on the river.

Instant hand warmers, fire starting equipment, and a small thermal blanket in a drybag take up very little space and add a lot of insurance against catastrophe. There's always a chance the weather can turn even colder. It is a good idea to carry a spare layer as well. If you plan ahead, these items can be split between paddlers so as to not overburden one boater.

Be prepared!

You should also be looking out for the people you are paddling with to make sure that they are dressed properly for the conditions. If you have extra pogies, gloves, a skull cap, or layers, keep them in your car. Even experienced boaters will forget these items from time to time.

Often signs of on setting hypothermia are not noticeable to the victim. It is important that you keep an eye on your paddling partners for these signs, especially after a swim.

If things turn very bad, PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A COLD DEAD BODY WHEN DEALING WITH HYPOTHERMIA, there is only a warm dead body! Continue rescue efforts, as long as others are not put into additional danger, until professional help arrives. The instances of a successful resuscitation from hypothermia with proper care are to numerous to cite here. DON'T GIVE UP!

Further information, including warning signs, follow. Be aware that the information that follows is not necessarily whitewater specific, and is for informational purposes only.

<http://www.chrisj.winisp.net/safety/hypothermia.htm>

[http://www.americanwhitewater.org/journal/jpg/index.phtml?thefile=1991\\_3\\_029.jpg](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/journal/jpg/index.phtml?thefile=1991_3_029.jpg)

[http://www.americanwhitewater.org/journal/jpg/index.phtml?thefile=1991\\_1\\_020.jpg](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/journal/jpg/index.phtml?thefile=1991_1_020.jpg)

[http://www.americanwhitewater.org/journal/jpg/index.phtml?thefile=1980\\_3\\_030.jpg](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/journal/jpg/index.phtml?thefile=1980_3_030.jpg)