



NOAA FISHERIES

National Observer Program

National Observer Program Advisory Team's Safety Advisory Committee

The Safety Advisory Committee (SAC) advises the National Observer Program Advisory Team (NOPAT) on matters of observer safety, health, and welfare. It works to promote a safer and healthier environment for observers to work in and is responsible for developing and recommending the requirements necessary to fulfill NOPAT's national safety standards, including:

- Spearheading and reviewing proposals on observer safety initiatives, along with monitoring and advising on any safety policies and programs which may affect NOAA Fisheries observers.
- Addressing specific safety issues through seminars, workshops, forums, and panel discussions.
- Developing training classes and standards for Observer Programs' safety trainers.
- Creating and maintaining mechanisms to enforce safety-related policies for Observer Programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Observer Safety: Donning Immersion Suits

Safety First for Successful Monitoring

We depend on our observers and at-sea monitors—professionally trained biological technicians who gather crucial information about what species are caught and discarded by U.S. commercial fishing vessels—to be our eyes and ears on the water. The work of observers is critical to effective fisheries management, and their safety on the job is of utmost importance. Navigating the marine environment can be challenging. Taking care to put safety first at every step ensures those challenges are met with success.

The Challenge: Donning Immersion Suits

In an emergency that may require leaving a vessel, survival could depend upon how quickly an observer is able to don his or her immersion suit. The suits greatly increase safety in the water, but can be difficult to put on quickly.

The Solution: Regular Practice

Regular practice should reduce donning time from minutes to seconds. Here are some tips and steps to keep in mind:

- Practice donning the suit while lying on the deck. In an emergency, vessel movement or list may prevent donning while standing.
- If the situation permits, wear or bring extra warm clothing.
- Start by working your legs into the suit.
- Next, move to a kneeling position and place your non-dominant arm into a sleeve.
- Then, use your dominant arm to pull the hood over your head, and then place it into the other sleeve. Once both arms are in the sleeves of the suit, you can adjust the hood again as needed.
- Finally, holding the zipper with one hand, pull the lanyard with your other hand to close it. Arching backwards can help ensure complete zipping. Secure the flap over your face and mouth.
- Wait until you are in the water to inflate the air bladder, to prevent injury to yourself or damage to the suit. If practical, ease or lower yourself into the water—jumping should only be a last resort.

Demonstration Video

You can watch a demonstration video at bit.ly/IMMERSIONSUIT.

