

Your Outfit

You are going to sea as a full-time fisherman, which means that you are going to sea to live as well as to work. Living on a boat is in several respects very different from living ashore. One of the things you need for successful living afloat is special clothing which may differ a great deal from the garb you use ashore.

Chances are that you have never been health-conscious—that you have never seen any particular reason for taking care of your health. Such care is quite necessary at sea, however, because a commercial fisherman can't call his doctor or send a boy up to the drugstore. He can't just call the office and announce, "I won't be in today. Got a nasty cold. Going to stay in bed all day." No sir, the fisherman must go on deck and attend to the business of getting a trip of fish on board, cold or no cold. Therefore, he must do his best to prevent that cold from getting started. And this is why you need special clothing: to protect your health as best you can.

Now, what kind of clothing should you wear at sea for your health and comfort? Watch what the rest of the crew wears, but some tips follow that are generally true of most vessels fishing deepwater.

Let's begin with the underwear which should be all or mostly wool. Wool does not get cold when wet, and as a commercial fisherman you will certainly get your underwear wet from perspiration, if not from that breaker over the railing which

is bound to give you a wet greeting, sooner or later.

Among deep-sea fishermen, the one-piece wool "union suit" is commonly worn, although many men prefer the two-piece. One piece or two? No matter, only let it be wool. Your fishing shirt and your fishing trousers—pants, in the vernacular of the fisherman—also should be woolen. Fishermen generally cut the shirt sleeves off about halfway between the elbow and the front end of the cuff. That cut should be sewed (cross-stitched) with woolen yarn to prevent raveling.

A wristlet is a knitted wool or nylon tube with a short, narrow thumb strap sewn onto one end. The wristlet, as indicated by its name, is made to protect your wrist and forearm. The smaller opening in one end fits the base of your thumb, the larger one the rest of your hand almost down to the knuckles. The body of the wristlet is pulled up over your forearm and part of your shirt sleeve to well above the elbow, where it is fastened by means of two strong, fairly large, safety pins. A set of wristlets, or "wristers" as they are also called, is an important item of clothing for a deep-sea fisherman. They keep your wrist warm, thus helping to prevent stiffness and soreness of the joints; they protect the skin of your forearms from being scratched or torn by such gear as web, hooks, and lines; and they prevent the cuffs of your oilskin coat from chafing your wrists. They should be washed at least daily.

Rubber boots should be large enough to allow air to circulate around your feet. Even a small amount of circulating air will minimize the natural rubber boot condensation to some degree. Woolen socks are, as a rule, worn outside cotton socks, or cotton socks inside sheepskin bootlets. Whatever the combination, have it on when trying new boots. The boot may be either three-quarter-length or full-length. It's a matter of personal preference. The three-quarter-length boot is heavily built, strong, and not easily punctured. It is easy to get into, can be kicked off with comparative ease in case of an emergency, and is the type most used.

Some men prefer the full-length boots, of the type used by steelhead fishermen. These boots are light and easy to pack around. They are insulated from the ankle down and are warm enough so that woolen socks and bootlets are not needed. A thin inner sole, and ordinary shore socks will serve. Being light, these boots cannot take the punishment that may be meted out to the stiffer, but more heavily built boots. They are susceptible to rips, tears, and punctures (by spines of dogfish, rockfish, etc.) and must be treated with a degree of care. Also, the full-length boots (hip boots) must generally be suspended from the pants belt with a lanyard. Personal preference varies.

If these light sports-type boots are used, a pair of suspenders for the pants may be a good idea. Some fishermen prefer suspenders because

this gives greater freedom around the waist. Boot types will vary considerably according to the type of work, sea conditions, and so forth. Inshore fishermen may use only knee length boots. Note what is the most used boot on your vessel as a guide.

In the offshore fishery, heavy duty, three-quarter-length boots seem most popular. They are stiff enough to remain extended without having to be suspended from a belt, and they extend only halfway up between the knee and the hip, although heavy-duty boots are also available in full hip boots. They are convenient to get on and off, which may pay dividends if they must be discarded in an emergency, like after falling overboard.

Oilskins—raingear, shore people call 'em. Not so in the fishing fleets, where we still use the traditional name, oilskins, although modern oilskins have nothing at all to do with oil. The word is a relic of the old days when oil-soaked cotton cloth was the material used.

There are any number of brands and qualities of oilskins to be had: all-rubber, rubberized, vinyl-coated, and so forth. The vinyl-coated types are excellent, resistant as they are to oil, grease, acid, and chemicals. Oilskins come in several colors: yellow, black, gray, green, etc. Be sure that the oilskins *you* buy are bright yellow. That bright color might save your life one night if you should go overboard. It also keeps you visible on a dark deck.

Oilskin pants worn outside the boots may bind at the knees. Pulling



up oilskin pants several inches and putting a heavy-duty rubber band around the pants leg gives needed freedom and may prevent the boot from being filled when an extra large breaker comes aboard.

What and how much to buy? Here is a list, as a general guide. Items will vary, depending on the fishery:

- 2 sets underwear
- 2 fishing shirts
- 2 pair fishing pants
- 2 pair wristlets
- 2 pair socks
- 1 pair deck slippers
- 2 pair bootlets
- 2 pair oil pants (one should have a spare pair of pants on board!)
- 1 oil jacket
- 1 pair boots
- 1 sou'wester, if no hood on the oil jacket.

It is not a good idea to look for bargains when you go out to buy your first outfit of fishing clothes. Such bargains can turn out to be costly indeed! The proper place to get your outfit is at a fishermen's outfitting store. Such stores carry all the stuff you need; their clerks are trained men, professionals who know your needs even better than you do yourself, and who are ready and willing to give you sound advice. Also, an outfitting store will let you have your outfit on credit if you should need it.

If the boat on which you have shipped trades at the store, your store bill will be deducted from your check at the time of settlement. If not, it will be to your advantage to pay your store bill promptly upon receiving your check. One of the worst things that can happen to a fisherman's name is to get a reputation for not paying his bills. Once earned, that kind of reputation will make it difficult to get a job on board a decent vessel, and impossible to get credit. The word has a way of getting around.

A small sewing kit with needles, thread, wool yarn, and a few buttons is necessary equipment for the

deep-sea fisherman, as is an inner-tube mending kit for repairing boots. If you are an habitual user of cigarettes, candy, or chewing gum, be sure that you take along an adequate supply of these items.

If you use cigarettes and the boat operates at sea outside the 3-mile territorial limit, sea stores may be purchased by the skipper through the custom house. Liquor is also available if the skipper so chooses, but not all do. Sea stores are tax free, and these cigarettes and liquor cost about half shoreside prices. These items must be kept locked up in town, cannot be taken ashore, and must be consumed at sea. Heavy fines and removal of the sea stores privilege can be the consequence of violations. Ask your skipper about this. Many buy the cigarettes, but others do not permit liquor aboard while at sea.

Gloves should be bought according to need, which depends upon what kind of fishery you are going into. The clerk in the outfitting store will give you good advice here. If you are entering the trawl fishery where you must handle used or old wire rope, be sure to get a pair of good, heavy leather gloves for wire rope work.

On a longline vessel you must furnish your own hook-set, a rather simple tool used for bringing a bent fishhook back into its proper shape. Before leaving on your first trip, ask one of the gang to show you how to make one. You'll also have to buy yourself a splicer, a small wooden-handled marlinspike used for "sticking gear," and for splicing lines. Yes, and you need to buy a good pocket knife, also.

One more item to buy: bedclothes. Some fishing vessels furnish a mattress for your bunk, but some of the older ones don't—you must pack your own. Many men prefer a good, heavy, air mattress while others prefer sponge rubber. Air mattresses may be inflated to whatever hardness is preferred. A rule of thumb is

that when sitting on it, your bottom just touches the bunk boards. Therefore, when lying down, the mattress will support all your body contours. It is very convenient to deflate, roll up, and put in your seabag when moving ashore or to another boat. Be certain that you have a patching kit. Punctures from chafing and nailheads in the bunk cause air leaks, sometimes at awkward times. The likelihood of air leaks increases with the age and quality of the mattress.

In a foam rubber mattress hardness is constant. It may be rolled up for transport, but will fill the sea bag and then some. It will not deflate. Its useful life is virtually indefinite so choose with care. It will be many years before you must buy another one. It requires no other maintenance than to keep it clean. Cost may be higher than for an air mattress, but this comparison may depend on the quality of air mattress you have in mind.

Foam rubber pillows are preferred by many fishermen. They do not ball up or form lumps and hardness is constant. Bedsheets are not generally used on board fishing boats. Blankets, yes, if you prefer them. A sleeping bag with two or more washable liners is, however, by far the easiest and most practical bedding.

Be aware that what is here being said about proper fishing clothes does not hold true for the summer fisherman, such as the seine and/or gill net fisherman operating on inside waters, such as in Puget Sound or southeastern Alaska. For summer (inside) fishing almost any old clothes will do. Oilskins, boots, and gloves, however, are "musts" in any waters, any time of year. Note, also, that in the purse seine and gill net fishery, a skirt or an apron is often used instead of oilpants, with no exposed buttons ever for the seine web to hook. And, do not forget that a sou'wester is part of a suit of oilskins, too, if your oil coat does not have a hood.