**Cold Weather Safety for Communicators**

An important factor in any winter operations is hypothermia awareness, prevention of cold weather exposure injuries and prompt treatment of affected personnel.

**Prevention = COLD** — **C**over, **O**verexertion, Layers, **D**ry

**Cover.**

Wear a hat or other protective covering to prevent body heat from escaping from your head, face and neck. Cover your hands with mittens instead of gloves. Mittens are more effective than gloves because mittens keep your fingers in closer contact with one another.

**Overexertion**.

Avoid activities that cause you to sweat a lot. The combination of wet clothing and cold weather can cause you to lose body heat more quickly.

**Layers.**

Wear loose fitting, layered, lightweight clothing. Outer clothing made of tightly woven, water-repellent material is best for wind protection. Wool, silk or polypropylene inner layers hold body heat better than cotton.

**Dry**.

Stay as dry as possible. Get out of wet clothing as soon as possible. Be especially careful to keep your hands and feet dry, as it’s easy for snow to get into mittens and boots.

**Winter driving safety**.

During cold-weather months, keep emergency supplies in your car in case you get stranded. Supplies should include several wool blankets (which are still warm when wet), matches, candles, a first-aid kit, dry or canned food, and a manual can opener. Travel with a cell phone if possible. If stranded, put everything you need in the car with you, huddle together and stay covered. Run the car for 10 minutes each hour to warm it up. Make sure a window is slightly open and the exhaust pipe isn’t covered with snow while the engine is running.

**Cold-water boating safety**

Water doesn’t have to be extremely cold to cause hypothermia. Any water colder than body temperature causes heat loss. The following tips may increase your survival time in cold water:

Wear your PFD. It enables you to float without using energy and provides some insulation. ALWAYS attach a utility knife, whistle, LED blinker and signal mirror to your PFD.

Get out of the water if possible. Get out of the water as much as possible, such as climbing onto a capsized boat or grabbing onto a floating object.

Don’t attempt to swim unless you’re close to safety. Unless a boat, a person or life jacket is near, stay put. Swimming uses up energy and shortens survival time. Position your body to minimize heat loss. Use the heat escape lessening position (HELP) to reduce heat loss while you wait for rescue assistance. Hold your knees to your chest to protect the trunk of your body. If you’re wearing a life jacket that turns your face down in this position, bring your legs tightly together, your arms to your sides and your head back.

Huddle with others. If you’ve fallen into cold water with other people, keep warm by facing each other in a tight circle.

Don’t remove clothing. While in water, don’t remove clothing. Buckle, button and zip up your clothes. Cover your head if possible. The layer of water between clothing and your body will help insulate you. Remove clothing only after you’re safely out of the water and can take measures to get dry and warm.

**TREATMENT OF HYPOTHERMIA**

The recommended treatment of hypothermia victims in the field is core rewarming to prevent post-rescue collapse.

Handle victims gently. Limit movements to only those that are necessary. Don’t massage. Excessive, vigorous or jarring movements may trigger cardiac arrest.  
Move the person out of the cold into warm, dry location if possible. If unable to move indoors shield victim from cold and wind as much as possible.

Remove wet clothing. Cut away clothing if necessary to avoid excessive movement.  
Cover victim with blankets. Use multiple layers of dry blankets or coats to warm the person. Cover the head also, leaving only the face exposed.

Insulate the victim from cold ground. If outside, lay victim on the back on a blanket or other warm or insulating surface.

Monitor breathing. Victims severe hypothermia appear unconscious, with no apparent signs of a pulse or breathing. If breathing has stopped or appears dangerously low or shallow, begin cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately.

Share body heat. Lie next to victim, making skin-to-skin contact. Then cover both of your bodies with blankets.

Provide warm beverages if victim is safely able to swallow. Avoid alcohol or caffeinated beverages.

Apply warm, dry compresses only to the neck, chest wall or groin, not to the extremities. Heat applied to arms and legs forces cold blood back toward the heart, lungs and brain, reducing core body temperature to drop and may induce cardiac arrest.

Don’t apply direct heat. Don’t use hot water, a heating pad or a heating lamp to warm the person. The extreme heat can burn the skin or induce cardiac arrest.