

Sailors' Guide to Cold Weather Sailing Gear

Winter clothing basics

To stay safe and comfortable in winter sailing conditions, you'll need clothing that a) helps keep out the water and b) retains warmth even when wet. The key is dressing in layers with the outer layer providing protection from rain and spray and the under layers providing warmth and insulation. Note: avoid cotton! Cotton absorbs water and stays cold. Stick with wool or synthetics (polypropylene, capilene, fleece, etc.) designed for active outdoor activities that shed water and retain warmth when wet.

Minimum requirements:

A typical cold weather sailing outfit will look something like this:

- **Base layer:** wool, polypro, or capilene long underwear (top and bottom)
- **Warmth layer:** fleece jacket or wool sweater (no cotton!)
- **Protection layer:** waterproof spray top and waterproof spray pants (can substitute rain or ski outerwear in a pinch)
- **Head:** wool or fleece watch cap
- **Feet:** wool or neoprene socks, rubber-soled dinghy boots or paddling booties (no sneakers!)
- **Hands:** polypro glove liners underneath, rubber kitchen gloves on top
- **Life Jacket:** US Coast Guard approved and correctly fitted Personal Flotation Device (PFD) must be worn at all times on the water.

Do I need a wetsuit?

Wetsuits are not required but highly recommended. Having a wetsuit on means you can keep sailing on those cold, windy days when sailors are likely to spend time in the river. Note: Laser sailors prefer a modified wetsuit called a "hiking suit" that features reinforced pads on the back of the legs to facilitate hiking. These are expensive (\$150+) and should only be considered if you plan to pursue competitive Laser sailing.

Other handy items to consider:

- Watch (waterproof with a countdown timer; i.e., Timex Ironman)
- Water Bottle (with carabineer or lanyard to attach to boat)
- Whistle (attached to PFD)
- Towel
- Sunscreen (SPF 15 or above)
- Duffle bag to carry it all

Resources

Most of this stuff (base and warmth layers, hats, gloves, etc.) is widely available, often at bargain prices. A couple of key items, such as spray tops and dinghy boots, are sailing specific and only available from sailing gear stores like West Coast Sailing, although you may find adequate substitutes for less money by shopping for paddling gear (very similar). Here's our list of recommended suppliers:

- **West Coast Sailing** (www.westcoastsailing.net). Best source locally for sailing specific gear. Everything you need is here, discounted 15% for all WSC youth sailors.
- **REI Coop** (www.rei.com). Extensive selection of cold weather clothing and paddling gear, including PFDs, spray tops, spray pants, wet suits, footwear. Good source for base layers, hats and glove liners.
- **Andy & Bax** (www.andyandbax.com). Good source for base layers, wet suits, hats, and footwear at budget prices.
- **Next Adventure** (nextadventure.net). Good deals on used and discontinued brands of wetsuits, spray tops, PFDs, and other paddling gear.

Summary:

	Base	Warmth	Protection
Head		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wool or fleece watch cap	
Top	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wool, polypro, or capilene long sleeve top	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• light fleece jacket or sweater• wet suit or hiking suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• waterproof spray top
Bottom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wool, polypro, or capilene long underwear bottom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wet suit or hiking suit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• waterproof spray pants
Feet		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wool or fleece socks• neoprene booties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• dinghy boots
Hands		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• polypro glove liners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• rubber kitchen gloves

and don't leave the dock without your PFD!