

U.S. Department of
Homeland Security

United States
Coast Guard



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A Letter to the Alaskan Commercial Fishing Industry
Regarding Federal Requirements for Infant Immersion Suits

The recent termination of a longliner off Kodiak, Alaska by a 17th District cutter has highlighted a significant and quietly simmering issue for small commercial family-based fishing operations: the lack of Coast Guard approved immersion suits for infants and small children less than 35-inches in height.

Federal regulations require that every person onboard a commercial fishing vessel in Alaskan waters be provided with a Coast Guard approved immersion suit of the proper size. However, there is no approved suit for infants smaller than the 35-inches in height covered by the smallest immersion suit available from Bayleysuit ("Toddler" model). This has created a gap in immersion suit availability for children from birth to about 2-1/2 years of age.

The marine environment of Alaska is harsh and unforgiving. Hundreds of commercial fishermen alive today would not have been so fortunate had properly fitting and well-maintained immersion suits not been available. While the Coast Guard appreciates the traditional nature of small family-based commercial fishing in Alaska, we do not recommend the carriage of infants aboard these vessels.

However, until such time as a manufacturer produces a Coast Guard approved immersion suit to fill this gap, the Seventeenth Coast Guard District is issuing conditional exemptions to individuals that request non-enforcement of the immersion suit requirements for their infants. Several conditions apply; most notably, a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD) of an appropriate size must be provided for the infant.

Commercial fishermen who are boarded at-sea with an infant aboard with no PFD should expect to have their voyage terminated. Likewise, children over 35-inches in height must be provided with a Coast Guard approved immersion suit that fits the child.

In addition, the Coast Guard is working with the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA) to explore different options and find an acceptable alternative. Several devices are being evaluated for their suitability, and we look forward to sharing the lessons learned.

Commercial fishing vessel owners who operate in Alaska with their infants (or children smaller than 35-inches in height) onboard are urged to contact the Seventeenth Coast Guard District Safety Coordinator at 907 463-2810, or their local Coast Guard FV dockside examiner, to request a conditional exemption.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. M. Lawrenson", written over a white background.

K. M. LAWRENSON
Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Coordinator
U. S. Coast Guard