

WINTER SURVIVAL TIPS

As a long-time winter camper, Paul Stegeman has learned through trial and error, and a lot of reading, what is the best way to stay safe and comfortable in cold weather. Most of this is common sense except for a couple of things that most folks don't think about before they go out into the cold. Most of these are suggestions, but a few are "rules" that should never be broken (these will be ***highlighted** below).

Rule 1: Cotton Kills In winter always avoid wearing any cotton. It stays wet for hours – hence it cools you very well in summer. In winter, cotton wet from sweat, rain and melted snow will lower your core body temperature and lead to hypothermia ... which can kill. Always wear polypropylene, silk, fleece or wool instead of cotton. This especially holds true for jeans as the pants that you wear. Most jeans are cotton.

Rule 2: Carry a quick change of clothes. If you get wet, change as soon as you can. Even in the middle of the trail or wherever you might be.

Rule 3: Don't sweat. Open your coat, shirt or sweater and ventilate so you don't soak your clothes with sweat.

Rule 4: Start with too few, rather than too many clothes. This will keep you from overheating as soon as you start to exert yourself, causing your clothes to get damp with sweat.

Rule 5: 20 degrees and dry is safer than 40 degrees and wet, weather-wise. The colder it is, the easier it is to stay dry. Paul has slept outside in minus-20 degrees and been fine, but when he got wet at 40 degrees, he had to hike out by flashlight at midnight. He was shivering uncontrollably and realized he was getting hypothermic. If you let that go, you lose your ability to reason and might ignore the worsening symptoms.

Carry fire starters to get your campfire going quickly. This could be part of a Durflame log, dryer lint soaked in Vaseline, even Fritos work (yes they burn VERY easily).

A candle lantern will warm a tent or shelter by 10 degrees. Vary one whenever you are out overnight. They provide nice light and can bail you out of trouble.

Only use a down-filled sleeping bag when you are sure that you can keep it dry on the trail. Otherwise, use a bag with artificial insulation.

Carry several chemical hand-warmers. There are filled with metal shaving and saltwater (or a chemical) that reacts to cause an exothermic reaction (this means they get hot). Keep one near your kidneys and one near your heart. This will warm your organs as your blood flows through. You will feel warmer because your blood is warmer. Through a couple of these into your sleeping bag about 30 minutes before climbing in for bed. Betty yet, put one between two layers of socks to keep your feet warm all night. Paul always carries 6 of these for each day he intends to be out in the woods.

If you are standing around, like on a boat, use an old piece of closed cell foam, insulation, cardboard or Styrofoam to insulate the bottom of your feet from the cold deck, ground or surface.

WARNING SIGNS OF HYPOTHERMIA ...

- Confusion or sleepiness
- Slowed, slurred speech, or shallow breathing
- Weak pulse; low blood pressure
- A change in behavior during cold weather or a change in the way a person looks
- Excess shivering or no shivering; stiffness in the arms or legs
- Chilly rooms or other signs that the person has been in a cold place
- Poor control over body movements or slow reactions

WHAT TO DO ...

Seek and create shelter from cold, wind, snow, and rain.

Conserve, share, and create warmth.

Share body heat.

Create body heat.

Build a fire.

Prevent heat loss.