

Hypothermia -- Dressing for the Weather

By David & Dori Dirig

Whether its was heading off to District Rally or enjoying this Southern California weather, I hope everyone ended their summer right. Yes, that's right, summer's over. I heard that some people had trouble with the heat on the way up to Sunnyvale, and this concerns me. Exposure is a concern, no matter the season. While its typical to worry about this in July as you plot a route across the desert, we need to start thinking about the other end of the spectrum, which can be just as dangerous.

As we taper out of summer into fall and winter, everyone should start thinking about cold weather gear. Diversity is a luxury that we enjoy here in Southern California, where we can go from one climate to another very quickly. The dangerous part of this is that we can go from one climate to another very quickly....Did you all get that?? So you take off for a nice ride in the afternoon one Saturday in November. As you climb to higher elevations, do you have your cold weather gear? You're gonna need it, even if its 70 degrees along the coast. Are your 'omigosh its cold' gloves in the side bag, or they still at home in the closet making room for that trip to Phoenix in July? How about that electric vest or snowmobile suit or thermal underwear? Exposure should be a concern to each of us, no matter the time of year; its simply a matter of what end of the spectrum that we prepare against. This summer we worried about heat and dehydration; now we need to prepare against cold and hypothermia.

Hypothermia is a lower than normal body temperature. That's fine, but what does it really mean? Basically, as your body loses heat, its starts to malfunction. Do your hands work as well when they're cold and numb? Your brain suffers the same problem in the cold. As you get cold, you lose the ability to concentrate and react to changing conditions. This can be fatal on a motorcycle.

How do we avoid hypothermia?? 1) Don't ride! Know your limits; don't ride if its too cold. If you're riding and you start to get cold, pull off, stop for a cup of coffee, rest your mind and your body someplace warm until you can continue. If your hands and mind are numb from the cold, are your reactions quick enough to save your life? If you have to ask, then pull over and warm up!! 2) Dress appropriately. This can mean super-thick insulated gloves and electric clothing, or it can simply mean wearing multiple layers for insulation. A pair of thermal underwear or silk liners for that lighter pair of gloves can make all the difference in the world. The idea is to wear multiple layers of clothing. In this way, you can add layers to keep warm or remove layers if you get overly warm. Wear multiple thin layers as opposed to one heavy layer, and the layers should fit loosely. A windproof outer layer is ideal to prevent the wind from chilling you. The idea is insulation, combined with protection from the wind blast of riding at highway speeds. The better your insulation and protection from the wind, the less heat you lose, thus reducing your risk of hypothermia.

Remember that we ride as a group. If you're cold, let us know so we can stop and let you put on additional layers. To do anything else is unsafe. Even if you don't have the needed gear on a ride, sing out. Someone in the group will most likely have additional gloves or liners or a sweatshirt to get you to where you're going safely. That's the bottom line; safety. As an individual and as a group, we need to be prepared for colder weather. It may seem silly to start talking about this in October, but go ahead and put that sweatshirt or heavier set in gloves in the bike. You (or someone else) may need it down the road.