

What You Need to Know About Drysuit Gaskets

Drysuit gaskets, also known as drysuit seals, may seem fairly low-tech, but in a way they're the trickiest part of the whole garment. Gaskets have to provide a water-tight seal against the skin of the user's neck and wrists (and ankles on some drysuits), while the movement of muscles and tendons beneath the skin are constantly changing the shape of the sealing surface. No other part of the drysuit has to perform a task like that.

Drysuit Gasket Materials

Most drysuit gaskets are made of natural latex rubber. Others are made from neoprene, the synthetic, "foamed" rubber that wetsuits are made from. Some high-end drysuits for SCUBA divers have silicone rubber gaskets, but they're elaborate, expensive, and not commonly used on drysuits for paddlesports, and since that's our only concern, we won't discuss them here.

Pros and Cons of Latex and Neoprene Drysuit Seals

Latex gaskets are stretchier than neoprene, so they can provide a good water-tight seal with less constriction and discomfort. This usually isn't an important issue for wrist seals, but many



Latex neck gasket on an [Enki Relief](#) drysuit by Mythic Gear

people are understandably uncomfortable with something tight around their neck. Latex gaskets are also somewhat delicate: they're prone to physical and environmental damage, and they have a limited life-cycle – usually three to five years before they need replacement.

Because it is less stretchy than latex, neoprene has to be somewhat tighter around your neck and wrists to keep the water out. A properly-sized neoprene neck gasket can therefore be difficult to pull over your head. (Neoprene neck seals that open and close with a Velcro tab, as found

on so-called semi-drysuits or paddling suits, are not water-tight. For a neoprene seal to be truly waterproof, it must be sewn to a fixed size.)

Neoprene is rugged and durable, and most damage can be fixed with a needle and thread and/or Aquaseal sealant. In contrast, the only solution to a torn latex gasket is usually replacement.

Some people are sensitive to latex. Manufacturers of most latex seals process the raw material to eliminate virtually all of the proteins that can cause allergy-like reactions, but users who are extremely sensitive should proceed with caution.

Latex gaskets come in two main shapes, conical (or tapered), and bottle-shaped, with a fairly abrupt "shoulder" that narrows down to a more or less cylindrical section around the neck or wrist. Conical gaskets are easily adjustable: if they are too tight, you can trim them to widen the

opening. (See [trimming instructions for knife](#) or [scissors](#).) Bottle-shape latex gaskets are not adjustable. As mentioned above, neoprene drysuit gaskets are not adjustable either.

Gasket Care

Neoprene gaskets require no special care. You simply wash them with the rest of the suit.

Latex gaskets degrade with time, due mainly to the effects of UV light, heat, and ozone, and special care is required to maximize their lifecycles. In storage, they should be protected from sunlight and excess heat.

Treating them periodically with certain chemicals may help preserve them. Gasket manufacturers and paddlers have a wide range of opinions on the best treatment, but options include: Armor-All, 303 Marine (or Aerospace) Protectant, McNett Seal Saver, food-grade silicone spray, and talcum powder.

Replacing a neoprene gasket requires sewing skills to handle the thick, resilient material. Most latex gaskets are glued on, and when they need replacing, the typical procedure is to simply cut the old one off at the glue line and glue a new one right over the remaining band of latex. Aquaseal is the adhesive of choice. Even for latex gaskets that are sewn in place and backed up with heat-seal tape, most people use the same method of replacement, cutting the old one off and gluing the new to the fabric.

It's not difficult to replace your own latex gaskets, and most paddlers do it themselves. If you'd rather not, most dive shops, many paddlesports vendors, and a number of individual drysuit specialists offer gasket replacement services.

Which is Better?

Neoprene gaskets are more convenient and less expensive in the long run. Latex gaskets are more comfortable, and they do a better job keeping you dry. The majority of drysuits are made with latex seals, and most paddlers prefer them, but in the end it comes down to your own preference and priorities.

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Visit the Mythic Gear website for more [tips on drysuit care](#).

www.MythicDrysuits.com



Conical latex wrist gasket on Mythic Gear's [Enki Relief](#) drysuit