

# Japan Trying To Make Business "Super Cool"

Tomoko A. Hosaka, Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — The Japanese government wants the country's suit-loving salarymen to be bold this summer. Ditch the stuffy jacket and tie. And for the good of a country facing a power crunch, go light and casual.

Japan's "Super Cool Biz" campaign kicked off Wednesday with a government-sponsored fashion show featuring outfits appropriate for the office yet cool enough to endure the sweltering heat.

This summer may be especially brutal. The loss of the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant, which was crippled by the March 11 tsunami, means electricity could be in short supply around the nation's capital, Tokyo, during especially hot days.

To prevent blackouts, the government is asking companies and government offices to cut electricity usage by 15 percent. It wants companies to limit air conditioning and set room temperatures at a warm 28 degrees Celsius (82 degrees Fahrenheit).

The idea isn't new. "Cool Biz" was introduced in 2005 by the environment minister at the time, Yuriko Koike. The campaign was part of efforts to fight global warming.

But with Japan dealing with an ongoing nuclear crisis and the aftermath of a magnitude-9.0 earthquake and tsunami, officials decided they needed to take Cool Biz one step further this year.

"When we started Cool Biz in 2005, people said it was undignified and sloppy," Koike said at the fashion show held at a Tokyo department store. "But this is now the sixth year, and people have grown accustomed to it."

Surveys by the Cabinet Office indicate that companies are gradually jumping on board. In a 2009 nationwide poll, 57 percent of about 2,000 respondents reported that Cool Biz had been implemented in their workplaces. The figure stood at 47 percent two years earlier and at less than a third in 2005.

So what's different with Super Cool Biz?

First, the dress code. Polo shirts, Aloha shirts and sneakers are acceptable now under the environment ministry's relaxed guidelines. Jeans and sandals are OK too under certain circumstances.

Men might even think of carrying a fan or trying a pair of tight pedal pushers like one model wore, though whether such fashion extremes would actually catch on is another matter.

Notably missing from the environment ministry's dress code are specific rules for

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women. Despite the omission, Wednesday's fashion show included ensembles for women as well.

Khakis, white pants and airy polyester dresses are all apparently acceptable.

For retailers selling casual clothes, Super Cool Biz could provide a much-needed boost after the disaster, which led consumers to cut back on spending. Chains like Fast Retailing's Uniqlo have stockpiled polo shirts and chinos in anticipation of strong demand.

Officials also hope to spur energy-saving creativity with the campaign, both in and out of the office. To deal with the heat, the ministry suggests using gel sheets or consuming foods that cool the body. It also encourages employees to limit overtime hours, consider working from home when appropriate and take two weeks of summer vacation.

"This is not just a temporary measure to survive this summer," said Ryu Matsumoto, the current environment minister who joined Koike and two other predecessors at the event. "This is going to be a big event to change the way of life in Japan and people's lifestyles."

Japan's tropical southern islands of Okinawa may offer some inspiration.

On the catwalk, models donned "Kariyushi" shirts, Okinawa's version of the Aloha shirt. Worn untucked, they are light and feature colorful prints of traditional island designs.

Kariyushi shirts are commonly worn by Okinawans in the summer, even in formal settings like business and political meetings. In 2000, the Kariyushi shirt jumped onto the global stage when heads of state, including former President Bill Clinton, wore them during the Group of Eight summit in Okinawa.

For society to truly embrace the Kariyushi shirt and Super Cool Biz, leadership must come from the top, said Keiichi Inamine, a former governor of Okinawa who attended the fashion show.

"It's important for people with standing in society to wear it," he said, referring to the hierarchical nature of Japanese society.

The country's leaders, however, may have had other things on their minds Wednesday.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan wore a traditional dark suit in parliament as he faced fire from opposition lawmakers calling for his resignation. Opposition leader Sadakazu Tanigaki also wore a suit, though to be fair, it was an unusually chilly day for June.

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