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Headline: Japan bureaucrats dress down to save planet

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TOKYO, Japan – In their stuffy grey suits, starched collars and boring ties, Japan's famed "salarymen" could hardly be accused of being at the cutting edge of sartorial innovation.

Now these warriors of the Japanese economy are being asked to ditch their sweaty battle attire for cooler T-shirts and trainers from Wednesday in a bid to turn down air conditioning and reduce electricity consumption following the March 11 disasters.

Since 2005 the government has encouraged office workers to cast off ties and jackets in the stifling summer months as part of a pledge to cut greenhouse gases by six percent, as part of the Kyoto protocol.

Environment Minister Ryu Matsumoto has announced a souped-up "Super Cool Biz" campaign this year to relieve the pressure on the electricity grid after the March 11 quake-tsunami and ensuing nuclear emergency.

A fashion show organised by the government in a chilly Tokyo on Wednesday to highlight the campaign caused a stir on the Twitter microblogging site, with mixed reactions to the launch.

"Take a salaryman out of a suit, and he still somehow looks like a salaryman," said illustrator mister_tim.

"Japan launches 'Super Cool Biz' to dress down and save energy at work. People complain it's too cold. Put a bloody jacket on, then," university researcher Kanetaka Maki offered.

When the earthquake struck the northeast coast of Japan, the crisis at the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant and other power stations triggered a drop in energy output.

Electricity companies have been scheduling power cuts and businesses have been cutting usage by dimming lights and turning off heated toilet seats, as well as installing low-energy bulbs.

Super Cool Biz encourages businesses and government departments to set the dial on air conditioners to 28 degrees Celsius (82 degrees Fahrenheit).

Employees in the ministry will set an example to corporate Japan by wearing cotton trousers, T-shirts and even loud Aloha shirts.

It is unclear how well the new regime will go down in a country where many are loath to challenge the status quo. In previous years, Cool Biz adherents have taken ties to work in their pockets and sneaked blazers into briefcases.

The prefectural government of disaster-hit Iwate has decided not to go as far as allowing jeans in the office to avoid making visitors feel "uncomfortable", the Kyodo news agency reported.

But the more conservative salarymen will be relieved to hear that the change in sartorial direction does not allow for flip-flops, shorts or vests.

The environment ministry announced results of the first Cool Biz campaign in October 2005, estimating that the campaign resulted in a 460,000-tonne reduction in CO2 emissions, equivalent to the CO2 emitted by about a million households for one month.

But for Wednesday's launch of this year's Cool Biz campaign the streets of downtown Tokyo's Ginza district have been more remarkable for the number of umbrellas and scarves on show than Hawaiian shirts.

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The temperature in Tokyo on Wednesday morning was six degrees below the June 1 average of 21.8 Celsius, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency website.