By Dawn Stanyon, AICI FLC, Professional Image Consultant

According to a recent Opinion Research Corporation survey, 74% of Americans believe that more casual wear in the workplace during the summer is appropriate. The conundrum is that what you consider appropriate may not be what your boss or clients consider professional. Here are a handful of tricks that can keep you cool while still being professional (sorry, men, this is focused on women's wear).

1. Flip-flops are for the beach or backyard not the workplace. Seventy-one percent of Americans surveyed in the Opinion Research Corporation poll believe flip-flops are not work appropriate. We agree. Why? They distract your co-workers when you go flapping by; they project an unprofessional image; and they aren't considered safe or appropriate footwear in many businesses. Consider peep-toe shoes instead.

2. Say yes to Cotton and loose fitting dresses. Less-structured and lighter-weight summer dresses naturally lend themselves to informality and comfort. However, keep the moo-moos and maxi dresses for summer parties. There are some beautiful draped dresses this season that look cool but still work in the office. Buy a few at end-of-season sales so you're ready for next summer.

3. Invest in neutral-colored and lightweight jackets: partially lined or unlined. Keep a jacket or two in your office (or shared closet space) so you can quickly grab it for meetings where you need to carry your professional image forward.

4. Sorry, no tube tops or spaghetti straps, ever. Fashion magazines recommend fun things like pairing a strapless dress with a lightweight cardigan for the workplace. This is dangerous. When you heat up from running around doing in-office errands or the AC goes out, you will not able to take off the cardigan or, worse, you will take it off. Bared shoulders are way too casual and sexy for the workplace.

5. Lighten up. You can look cool even if you don't feel cool. Invest in a light-toned purse or brief case (beige, white, cream) and put away your big black satchel. Judiciously wear bright colors. A bright dress with a neutral cardigan is a great idea. A pop of watermelon, lime or lemon looks as refreshing as the fruits actually taste.

The take-a-way here is that workplace dressing during the warm weather months can be comfortable but still considerate and respectful of co-workers so that they feel comfortable too.

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Dawn is a Certified Image and Professional Development Consultant. A graduate of The Emily Post Institute, the London Image Institute, 360Reach Brand Analyst training and WSET Level 1 wine certification, Dawn's focus is on empowering people to reach professional success. As Director of Sales at The Emily Post Institute, she worked with the Post family for nine years. Prior to Emily Post, she was a non-profit director of development and community relations, a PR and fundraising consultant, and a graduate of the University of Vermont.

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