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**COLDCASENEW FALL SWEATERS FOR THE OFFICE CHILL**

By **SERENA FRENCH** - Post Fashion Editor

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September 25, 2006 -- AMONG work wardrobe offenses, it is more widespread than the visible panty line, more insidious than the muffin top and has escaped the notice of policy handbook writers everywhere.

It is the office sweater.


You have one - protection against drafts and that airconditioning vent above your cubicle. It hangs on the back of your chair now that your good sweater was stolen. You ran over the sleeves with your chair a few dozen times, the left arm is a little longer than the right, and you wear it with 4-month-old Chinese takeout and 2-week-old hot sauce on it. It is pilled like a Himalayan mountain goat. People mistake you for a sherpa when you walk by.

"You wear your thickest one because you're so freezing and miserable, and it really looks more like a bathrobe," says Lynette Lewis, author of "Climbing the Ladder in Stilettos: 10 Strategies for Stepping Up to Success and Satisfaction at Work." "It's either a sweater or the old pashmina that's all pilled that they got for \$5 on the street."

This is how you've rationalized the office sweater.

"Those of us who would not be caught dead in anything that didn't speak of the latest trend somehow think, 'I'm just going to keep a sweater I don't like that much because I don't want "the good ones" to be missing from my closet,'" says Lewis. "So here we are wearing our least favorite sweater, that doesn't match a thing, that's on the way out of style, and yet we're wearing it every

day."  
You need to take it home and get it dry-cleaned.



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Better yet, you need to get a new one.

"There are so many great choices for gorgeous, easy-to-wear cardigans this fall that there is no excuse for not looking pulled together. You can have both a comfortable and chic option," says Self's editor-in-chief Lucy Danziger. "They range from a Banana Republic sweater that has a pattern and leather covered buttons for \$98. Or you can go more expensive and get a heavy, 16-ply cashmere sweater from Michael Kors or Ralph Lauren and that you'll have for the rest of your life. You get it in a classic color like black, brown, gray or white and it goes with everything."

If you have the office sweater habit, it's worth investing in a couple to co-ordinate with different outfits. Lewis is a fan of Zara's cardigans that, at \$25, are inexpensive enough to justify stocking up on a small selection of colors.

"Anticipate that this is going to be something that you need, the same way that you need shoes you can wear in the rain," says Danziger.

"You need some things like that that you can keep at work, and a sweater is great because you can fold it up and put it in your bottom drawer. It's very useful to have a beautiful wrap or sweater jacket that you can keep on the back of your chair and pull on if a meeting gets chilly."

Not to mention make you more productive. "It can be a comfy friend, but it should make your outfit look more pulled together," Danziger says. "The sweater suddenly got dressy and chic, so why not take advantage of that?"

**PUT THESE IN DEEP FREEZE**

\* Just any old sweater will not do. The shapelessness, neon color and missing buttons together put this sweater over the edge of acceptable. You should be sent home to change.

\* Hoodies, rustic toggle cardigans, tracksuit jackets, pajama tops, bathrobes, sweatshirts - all fall in the category of leisure wear - should not cross the threshold of your workplace.

\* Busy patterned pashminas - they will inevitably clash with what you are wearing and tend to imply, "I'm cold, helpless and a little dramatic."

\* Picnic blankets and scraps of fabric - unprofessional, unless you work the mountain or jungle circuit. Putting on a sweater is fine; swaddling is not. The Western world demands tidy tailored garments with sleeves.

**CREATIVE CHIC**

Cold at work? Wear a lively shade to stave off the granny look. Orange cashmere cardigan, \$228, at Henri Bendel; Navy silk jacquard dress, \$328, at Marc by Marc Jacobs (403 Bleecker St.); Two-tiered necklace with hammered gold vermeil disks and labradorites, \$665, at Alexis Bittar (465 Broome St.); Silk ribbon iolite stone bracelet, \$175, at BethLauren.com; Scorah Pattullo patent leather platform T-straps, \$340, at Chuckies (1073 Third Ave.)

**Business Casual**

Hang up your jacket and put on a shawl-like sweater for comfort. Fuchsia ribbed shawl sweater, Autumn Cashmere, \$255, at Bergdorf Goodman; Brown cotton ribbed tank, \$35, Michael Stars, michaelstars.com; Brown Alice + Olivia wool jeans, \$264, at Barneys (660 Madison Ave.); Croc-embossed leather belt, \$40, at talbots.com; Sedgwick Aurora earrings, \$165, at Alexis Bittar (465 Broome St.); Brown suede peep-toe platform pumps, \$69.95, at Steve Madden

**No jacket required**

Keep your cardigan fitted and belt it for a more finished look. Red cashmere cardigan, \$228, at Henri Bendel; Brown cashmere cardigan, \$158, at J. Crew; Purple crepe georgette micro-pleat skirt, Piazza Sempione, \$488, at Bergdorf Goodman; Vintage fish-scale belt, \$75, at LF Store (150 Fifth Ave.); Brown suede platform pumps, at Steve Madden

**Street Smart**

This cardigan is tailored to look like a jacket and can replace it.

Gold sleeveless silk blouse with necktie, \$128; Black merino wool double-breasted sweater jacket with stand-up collar, \$198; Wool pencil skirt, \$128, all at Kenneth Cole (610 Fifth Ave.); Black leather double-ankle-strap shoes, \$500, at Cesare Paciotti, (833 Madison Ave.)

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