

Tips For Planning Holiday Parties

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For example, parties can be fertile ground for unwanted sexual overtures that result in harassment complaints. Additionally, they can lead to lawsuits if intoxicated employees leave and are involved in car accidents.

Employers can reduce their potential liability by taking steps to control unprofessional behavior at parties. To begin with, employers should have legally defensible policies addressing alcohol abuse, harassment, and social media posts. Beyond that, here are some tips for making holiday gatherings safer:

- Consider using an off-site facility and a professional bartending service that have their own liability insurance.
- When announcing the party, consider sending employees an e-mail reminding them that the company's work rules and standards of conduct apply at business events outside the office, including at the party.
- Make sure bartenders have been trained to request proof of age from anyone who looks too young to drink; to not over-pour drinks; and to notify HR representatives who are at the party if someone is consuming too much alcohol.

- Consider limiting alcoholic drinks to beer and wine, and make sure there are plenty of non-alcoholic beverages available.
- Make sure there is ample food and entertainment to prevent drinking from becoming the focus of the party.
- Limit the length of the party and stop serving alcohol at least one hour before it is scheduled to end.
- Hire a security service or an off-duty police officer or security guard to be present during and after the party.
- Consider having alternative transportation available for employees who overindulge and/or offering to reimburse employees who opt to use a rideshare service to get home.
- Tell employees the party is a voluntary social event and attendance is not required. Requiring attendance could obligate the company to pay employees for being at the party.

If there is a complaint about alleged harassment at the party, conduct a prompt and thorough investigation and take appropriate remedial action to preserve the company's defenses against a legal claim.

Addressing these issues does not have to send a "Bah, humbug!" message. Considering how best to ensure that all employees enjoy the party and get home safely can help employers avoid starting off the new year facing a lawsuit. Happy holidays!

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