



Of Ebola, Terrorists and Plane Crashes

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Steve Miller was quoted on *SHRM* on October 27, 2014. The article “Of Ebola, Terrorists and Plane Crashes,” examined the importance of establishing workplace costume guidelines and offering accommodations to workers who might be offended either by a Halloween-themed party or the costumes that come with it.

In today’s workplace and litigious society, caution is indeed the way to go,” Steve said. “If someone wants to dress in a racy or inappropriate costume, tell them to take it to a private party or a bar. Don’t bring it to the workplace.”

Terrorist costumes at work, Steve said, can cause disruption and anxiety, especially for Muslims who can be mistakenly associated with radical Islamism and terrorism.

Workplace costume guidelines must specify that costumes playing to racial stereotypes are off-limits, Steve said.

Any company lawyer should be concerned about costumes that depict people with disabilities, however innocently. An example, Steve said, is a worker who comes dressed as Stephen Hawking, the famed physicist who has a motor neuron disease that’s left him almost entirely paralyzed.

“I’ve seen costumes of people who wear Mickey Mouse shirts, acting like they’re Asian tourists in Disneyland, walking around with cameras and handing out fortune cookies,” he said.

“Even things like witches can offend some religious sensibilities,” Steve said, referring to Christians who shun Halloween because they believe it celebrates demons and evil.

Banning witch costumes—a staple of Halloween—may be going too far for some companies. Instead, Steve advised employers to spell out their costume policies first, then offer accommodations to workers who might be offended either by a Halloween-themed party or the costumes that come with it.

“Employees may object to the presence of Halloween decorations or parties or costumes based on religious ideas,” he said. “If it’s just a luncheon, they don’t have to go. But if people are reporting to work in costume and they find that offensive to their religious beliefs, give these employees a paid day off.”

To read the full article, please visit [SHRM](#).

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