



How to Hold a Holiday Party and Not Get Sued

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Planning a holiday party? Every year about 2 out of 3 companies celebrate the holiday season with their employees. I am not saying to be a Scrooge, but beware. Anticipating and planning in advance for the most common party related problems can drastically reduce possible problems from blossoming into full fledged catastrophes. Often, simple steps such as reminding managers that they are still managers when attending functions instills a sense of responsibility. When balancing the ever present risks with the rewards of holding holiday parties, companies can greatly reduce their legal liability by observing as many of the following recommendations as possible:

1. If possible, don't serve alcohol.
2. Invite spouses and significant others so that there will be someone there to help keep your employees' behavior in control and, if necessary, get them home safely.
3. Always serve food if you serve alcohol, and always have plenty of non-alcoholic beverages available.
4. If your party is a dinner, consider serving only wine or beer (plus non-alcoholic alternatives) with the meal.
5. If you do serve alcohol, do not have an "open bar" where employees can drink as much as they want. Instead have a cash bar or use a ticket system to limit the number of drinks.
6. Let your managers know that they will be considered to be "on duty" at the party. They should be instructed to keep an eye on their subordinates to ensure they do not drink too much, and to curb or eliminate their own consumption of alcohol.
7. Consumption of alcohol lowers inhibitions, and impairs judgment. This can result in employees saying and doing things that they would not ordinarily do. Remind employees that, while you encourage everyone to have a good time, your company's normal workplace standards of conduct will be in force at the party and misconduct at or after the party can result in disciplinary action.
8. Hire professional bartenders (don't use supervisors!) and instruct them to report anyone who they feel has had too much.
9. Arrange for no-cost taxi service for any employee who feels that he or she should not drive home.
10. Never, never, never hang mistletoe. Take a look at item number 7 again, and you'll see why.

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