



Spooky Scenarios

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Halloween is not just for children anymore. Over the last few years, the number of employers allowing employees to wear costumes to work in celebration of Halloween appears to be increasing and, in some cases, this has even been embraced by the general public. Such celebrations are not limited to any particular type of employee or industry, individuals working in the retail industry as well as attorneys appearing in court are regularly spotted in costume on Halloween. In short, this is a custom that does not appear to be leaving the workplace anytime soon.

As employers are acutely aware, the economic downturn has sparked a rash of employment-related litigation. Accordingly, now more than ever, employers need to be sensitive about maintaining a positive work environment. In addition, some employees find Halloween offensive or unnecessary. Costumes that are sexually provocative, carry a political or social message, or are otherwise simply inappropriate for interacting with co-workers and customers, could lead to a liability nightmare for employers.

The proper planning of a Halloween event and monitoring through the workday will help lessen any such risks. To that end, the following are some guidelines for managers and supervisors for any Halloween celebrations:

- Decide if costumes are appropriate for the workplace.
- Clearly communicate costume guidelines in advance.
- Remind employees they are still at work.
- Don't overreact, but be sensitive to the issues.
- Think about any feedback the company received from employees or customers regarding last year's Halloween party or employee costumes.
- Offer alternative celebrations.
- Be prepared to discipline, if necessary.

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Steve A. Miller

Partner

312.580.7817

Email