

'TIS THE SEASON FOR HOLIDAY PARTY LIABILITIES

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As the holiday season is quickly approaching us, the daunting task of planning and preparing for your company's holiday party is at hand. 'Tis the season to be jolly, so planning for this annual end-of-the-year celebration should be a fun project, right?

Not exactly.

While chances are likely that the party will go smoothly, party planners should always prepare for disaster. Possible scenarios include:

- What if your guests drink excessively and don't have safe rides home?
- What if someone is injured or causes an injury during the party?
- What if your festive treats give someone food poisoning?

While these scenarios are unlikely, they still could occur and have in the past during holiday functions. What may be a good laugh at the time, could still land one or more employees as well as the human resources department in big trouble the following Monday as well as being the topic of discussion around the water cooler.

Anticipating and planning in advance for the most common party-related problems can drastically reduce possible problems from turning into full-fledged catastrophes. Approximately one third of employees report some form of employee misconduct at holiday parties, including excessive drinking, fighting and unwelcomed sexual advances. This

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misconduct may lead to employer liability. Make sure every employee is aware of this behavior and the consequences for each action. If such a problem does arise, it is important to report the incident in writing and in accordance with your normal harassment policy and procedures.

Another important issue that often times gets overlooked when planning your company's holiday soiree, is to carefully respect everyone's religious background. Always be sure to refer to the party as a "holiday" party as there are so many holidays worth celebrating this time of year and you do not want to make anyone feel left out.

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