

Keeping the Holidays Merry: A Checklist for Your Next Office Party

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The winter season is here, and with that comes a staple of the holiday season: workplace parties. Although such festivities are wonderful opportunities to network and celebrate with colleagues, employers should be aware of the various risks related to such events, especially if alcohol will be served. Therefore, when planning such events, employers should be mindful of the potential for injury and inappropriate behavior, and consider the following preventative measures:

- Remind employees of the Company's expectations in terms of proper behavior and provide specific examples of same. Review or issue policies relating to expectations at employer-sponsored functions.
- If applicable, remind employees to give work-appropriate gifts for any holiday exchanges.
- Remind members of management to set good examples.
- Review the Company's insurance coverages to see what is or is not covered and confirm that the Company has adequate coverage in place.
- Ensure holiday customs are work appropriate and avoid any, for example, that may give rise to sexually-charged scenarios, like hanging mistletoe.
- Consider permitting employees to bring guests as a way of minimizing inappropriate behavior. Employees may be more behaved when they are with a date.
- Limit and monitor the amount of alcohol served and consumed. Consider holding the event at an outside venue that has a liquor license and/or hiring a professional bartender so alcohol is distributed by a professional who is trained to handle individuals when they exceed a reasonable amount of alcohol. It is not advisable to allow employees to serve themselves because then there is no one monitoring the consumption.
- Confirm that any vendors are appropriately licensed and insured to avoid injuries, for example, from contaminated foods.
- Arrange for transportation to and from events.
- Consider holding the event after working hours and remind employees and contractors that attendance is voluntary.
- Avoid sponsoring or attending after-parties.