

‘Tis the Season to Mitigate Liability: An Employer’s Checklist for Holiday Parties

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The holiday season is upon us, and with that comes every HR professional’s biggest cause of indigestion: workplace parties. While organizations throughout the country are preparing to hold their annual holiday celebrations, a tradition which may have required a brief hiatus during the previous two COVID-impacted years, employers may overlook some critical steps to ensure a safe, fun and hopefully liability-free celebration for their employees.

Therefore, while planning such events, employers may want to consider the following precautionary measures:

- Limit and/or monitor the amount of alcohol served and consumed. Consider holding the event at a location 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 consume more than a reasonable amount of alcohol. It is not advisable to allow employees to serve themselves because then there is no one monitoring their consumption.
- Remind employees of the Company’s expectations in terms of proper behavior and provide specific examples. Review or issue policies relating to expectations at employer-sponsored functions. Such policies should provide that when alcohol is served, employees are expected to enjoy it responsibly and remain sober at all times.
- Remind members of management to set a good example.
- Review your insurance policy to confirm you have adequate coverage.
- Remind employees that policies against discrimination and harassment continue to apply equally at all work-related events.
- If applicable, remind employees to give work-appropriate gifts for any holiday exchanges.

- Ensure holiday customs are work appropriate and avoid any, for example, that may give rise to sexually-charged scenarios, like hanging mistletoe.
- Confirm that any vendors are appropriately licensed and insured to avoid injuries, for example, from contaminated foods.
- Arrange for transportation to and from the event.
- Consider holding the event after working hours and remind employees and contractors that attendance is voluntary.
- Avoid sponsoring or attending after-parties.

An office holiday party can be one of the highlights of the year when steps are taken to minimize the risks associated with an employer hosting a company party. Have fun, but proceed with caution! Should you have any questions about implementing policies for your upcoming party, please contact [DanaLynn Colao](#) of Saiber LLC's Employment & Labor Law Practice.