

Make Sure Your Company is Walking in a Worry-Free Wonderland This Holiday Party Season

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Make your list, check it twice – and don't forget to brush up on HR and employment law guidelines before hosting your organization's holiday party. While an end-of-year celebration can be a great way to celebrate the year's successes and unwind with colleagues, it's important to follow best practices to ensure all participants have a safe, festive, and fun time.

Before the celebration, employers should consider implementing the following expectations and guidelines so all attendees feel comfortable and safe:

- 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 recognize when individuals may have over-indulged. It is not advisable to allow employees to serve themselves because then there is no one monitoring their consumption.
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- If alcohol is being served, be sure to provide food as well so individuals are not drinking on an empty stomach.
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- Remind employees of the Company's policies and expectations of appropriate workplace behavior, which apply even if the event is held at an off-site location. Such policies should expressly state that when alcohol is served, employees are expected to enjoy it responsibly.
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- Reiterate that policies against discrimination and harassment apply with equal force at all work-related or work-sponsored events.
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- Reinforce that members of management are expected to set a good example.
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- Provide festive "mocktails" to include those who do not consume alcohol in the seasonal fun.

- Arrange for transportation to and from the event and/or encourage ridesharing, carpooling with a designated driver, or using public transportation if available.
- Engage vendors that are appropriately licensed and insured.
- Be mindful that this time of year can bring heightened stress for many people. Remind employees of employee assistance programs that may be available to them.
- If applicable, remind employees to give work-appropriate gifts for any holiday exchanges.
- Ensure holiday customs are work-appropriate and avoid any that may give rise to inappropriate scenarios, for example hanging mistletoe.
- Use secular language and symbols to ensure inclusivity of a religiously diverse workforce.
- Consider holding the event after working hours and remind employees and contractors that attendance is voluntary.
- If attendance is mandatory, ensure wage and hour laws are followed.
- Avoid sponsoring or attending after-parties.

Should you have any questions about implementing policies for your upcoming party, contact DanaLynn Colao of Saiber LLC's Employment & Labor Law Practice.