

10 Tips for Planning a Safe Company Holiday Party



Yes, it's that time of year again. Holiday season usually means office parties. When done right and planned with an eye toward safety, parties can be a lot of fun. But when no thought is given to safety, holiday parties can expose the attendees to injuries and companies to liability.

The most obvious cause of potential problems is alcohol. Although most people are perfectly capable of having a drink or two without issue, it only takes one employee or guest to get drunk and, say, sexually harass a co-worker, fall down and get hurt or drive home drunk.

Employers are starting to eliminate or limit the consumption of alcohol at holiday parties. For example, we recently asked if you planned to have a company holiday party at which alcohol will be served.

The good news is that many of you seem to be heeding the warnings of the dangers of serving alcohol at holiday parties, with 22% have 'dry' parties and another 41% having cash bars, which can minimize the amount of drinking. In addition, 11% are limiting everyone to two drink tickets. (And sadly, 9% aren't having a party at all.)

But another 17% will have an open bar, which can be a recipe for disaster.

Use this holiday party safety checklist when planning your office party to ensure that it's safe for all attendees.

And the law firm Borden Ladner Gervais released a useful guide to planning a safe holiday party and avoiding liability risks that includes these 10 tips:

1. Consider whether the party should be alcohol-free;
2. If alcohol will be available, avoid open bars or unlimited alcohol. Instead, consider offering one or two drink tickets a person;

3. Ensure that alcohol consumption can be adequately monitored and limited and that no one is served to the point of intoxication;
4. Assign one or more management level persons to oversee the event. At the very least, a dedicated individual should stay sober and observe and assist employees and guests;
5. Consider having the party during the day rather than in the late afternoon or evening as transit options may be more flexible and the party is less likely to spill over into a local bar;
6. Offer non-alcoholic beverages and food;
7. Offer cab chits, local hotel accommodations or some other method of ensuring that employees have safe transportation home;
8. Advertise alternate travel options in advance and discourage employees from bringing their cars to work on the day of the party. Consider ways to ensure that employees actually use alternate travel options, such as handing in car keys;
9. In the event that an employee becomes intoxicated, ensure that the employee doesn't drink and drive and can reach home safely. As necessary, involve the employee's family or local police to assist; and
10. Keep work-related events short and offer activities beyond drinking.