

Holiday Season Workplace Safety & Compliance Game Plan



The song says it's the most wonderful time of the year. And in some ways, it is. But the holiday season is also a time of great challenge for OHS directors. While keeping workers safe and healthy is a year-round imperative, the months of November and December introduce new risk factors that make workplace injuries more likely to occur, including stress and year-end deadlines. Here's a 10-step Game Plan to help you manage the special workplace health and safety hazards during the holiday season.

Step 1. Don't Let Holiday Decorations Create Fall Hazards

Decking the halls isn't so jolly when it results in [slips, trips, and falls](#). Best practices for protecting workers from workplace decoration [fall hazards](#):

- Ensure workers use appropriate [ladders](#) when hanging decorations from high spaces;
- Keep walkways clear of decorations;
- Run electrical cords and [extension cords](#) along walls rather than through or across doorways or under carpets where they can overheat and cause a fire; and
- Ensure decorations are firmly secured to walls, ceilings, and roofs.

Step 2. Don't Let Holiday Lights Create Electrical Hazards

Holiday lights are a frequent source of electrical and burn injuries. [Electrical safety](#) best practices for the holiday season:

- Select lights that have the mark of an accredited certification agency such as CSA, cUL, or cETL;
- Check the [Healthy Canadians Recalls and Safety Alerts Database](#) to ensure lights haven't been subject to a recent recall;
- Use light strings indoors only if they're rated for indoor use;
- Ensure that lights don't exceed the wattage recommendation listed on the package instructions;
- Inspect each light bulb for cracks and other damage before putting it up;
- Inspect light strings and extension cords and don't use any that are frayed or have exposed wires, loose connections, or broken light sockets.
- Avoid plugging too many lights and decorations into an outlet to prevent overloaded circuits that can overheat and start a fire; and
- Use Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters outlets when plugging in outdoors.

Step 3. Guard Against Christmas Tree Fires

An estimated 200 Christmas tree and lighting fires occur in Canada each year. These fires tend to be more deadly than average fires. Best practices for [fire prevention](#) during the holiday season:

- Don't use artificial trees or ornaments unless they're

nonflammable or labeled “fire resistant”;

- When using a live tree, cut off about 2 inches of the trunk to expose fresh wood for better water absorption;
- Keep live trees properly watered and remove them from your workplace when they become dry;
- Keep trees at least 3 feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources;
- Don’t hang lit candles on Christmas trees; and
- Ensure that the last person to leave the facility turns off the tree lights.

Step 4. Guard Against Liability Risks If Serving Alcohol During Holiday Parties

Serving eggnog and other alcoholic beverages during the annual [holiday party](#) is a tradition for many companies. But it carries a cost, namely, the risk of liability for the injuries that guests may inflict while driving drunk after the event. In legal terms, hosts who serve alcohol can’t simply unleash their drunken guests onto the public – they must take reasonable steps to ensure those guests don’t harm themselves or innocent people. This is called “host liability” and it extends to employers who serve alcohol during company social events. There are 3 [things you can do to manage these risks](#):

Limit or Monitor Alcohol Consumption: Either issue a limited number of drink tickets which are nontransferable to each guest or, if there are no limits on consumption, designate a bartender or other person to serve as drinks monitor responsible for keeping track of how many drinks each guest has.

Determine Whether Guests Are Intoxicated: While they don’t have to administer blood tests and breathalyzers, hosts are expected to make what courts call “reasonable assumptions”

about whether guests are impaired based on how many drinks they've had and other factors affecting impairment, such as the individual's sex and weight.

Prevent Intoxicated Guests from Driving: You must take steps to prevent guests you know or have reasonable grounds to suspect are impaired from driving after leaving the event. Such steps may include taking their car keys, calling them a cab, or requiring them to call a friend or family member to pick them up. If all else fails, you might need to call the police to keep the guest from getting behind the wheel.

Step 5. Ensure Food Safety

As with alcohol, serving food at your holiday party involves liability as well as health risks, particularly if guests contract food poisoning by eating food contaminated with *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *listeria*, or other bacteria, viruses, or parasites. You should also ask about and be prepared to accommodate the dietary requirements of each guest before you serve them. Basic health and sanitation tips include ensuring that:

- Hot foods are kept hot (140°F/60°C) and cold foods are kept cold (40°F/4.4°C);
- Certain foods are kept separate, such as raw and cooked meat;
- All food is served on clean dishes;
- Servers and food handlers are diligent in washing their hands with soap and warm water, including but not limited to after using bathrooms;
- Utensils, tables, counters, and other contact surfaces are kept clean; and
- Thermometers are used to ensure that meats are cooked to a safe temperature, including 180°F/82°C for whole poultry, 165°F/74°C for stuffing, casseroles, leftovers, egg dishes, ground turkey, and ground chicken, including

sausages containing poultry meat, 160°F/71°C for pork chops, ribs and roasts, and for ground beef, ground pork and ground veal, including sausages, and at least 145°F/63°C for whole muscle beef and veal cuts, like steaks and roasts.

Step 6. Protect Temporary Workers

Holiday season is the time for [temporary workers](#). Regrettably, because they're inexperienced and unfamiliar with the workplace and operations, temps tend to be particularly vulnerable to injury. And if injuries to temps do occur, the [host employer may face OHS fines and penalties](#). So, if you plan to use temps this holiday season, work with the temp agency to keep those workers safe. Strategy:

- Perform a joint hazard assessment by reviewing all task assignments, written job descriptions, anticipated exposures, job hazard analyses, equipment and/or machinery, and worksites to identify potential hazards to temps;
- Invite somebody from the temp agency to visit the worksite for a walk-through so they can observe safety conditions, workers performing the tasks temps will be assigned, and the safety measures you have in place to protect those workers;
- Provide and ask the temp agency to review a copy of your OHS program;
- Include language in the contract that sets out and requires the agency to meet certain responsibilities to protect the safety of each temp placed, such as verifying that they have the necessary training and experience to operate the equipment or perform the jobs they'll be assigned;
- Provide temps safety and orientation training, including a walk-through of the facility before they start the job; and

- Ensure temps have all of the PPE and protective equipment they need to work safely.

Step 7. Implement a Visitors Safety Policy

Many workplaces host relatively high volumes of vendors, customers, upper managers, and other outside visitors during the holiday season. In addition to being at risk of injury, visitors have a tendency to disrupt your usual work operations and interfere with safety measures, such as by smoking in locations containing high concentrations of airborne combustible materials. That's why it's advisable to implement a written [visitors safety policy](#) that requires:

- All visitors to sign in before entering and sign out before leaving the workplace;
- A supervisor, manager, or other company official to provide visitors a safety briefing, including with regard to the facility's emergency procedures after they sign in;
- Visitors to use appropriate PPE and list what that is;
- Visitors to obey all posted safety and warning signs; and
- Visitors to follow a specific code of conduct, such as by refraining from touching equipment, smoking, engaging in horseplay, entering restricted areas, etc.

Step 8. Implement Necessary Crowd Control Measures

As illustrated by the Black Friday shopper riot resulting in the death of a 34-year-old Walmart worker in 2008, big and unruly holiday crowds may pose safety dangers at stores, airports and other workplaces. [Crowd control safety](#) best practices:

- Create and train workers in policies to control and manage events likely to draw large crowds, like holiday sales;
- Work with local fire and police departments to ensure that the event meets all public safety requirements;
- Provide legible and visible signs that list entrance and exit locations, opening times, and other important information such as the location of major sale items and restrooms;
- Prepare and train workers in an emergency plan that addresses potential dangers facing workers, including overcrowding, crowd crushing, being struck by the crowd, violent acts, and fire;
- Set up barricades or rope lines for crowd management that have an adequate number of breaks and turns at regular intervals to reduce the risk of customers pushing from the rear and possibly crushing others, including workers;
- Designate workers to explain approach and entrance procedures to the arriving public, and direct them to lines or entrances;
- Ensure outside personnel have radios or other ways to communicate with personnel inside and emergency responders;
- Provide a separate entrance for staff along with door monitors to keep the crowd from trying to use those entrances;
- Post uniformed guards, police or other authorized personnel at entrances;
- Use a public address system or bullhorns to communicate with the crowd and event managers; and
- Provide a safe entrance for people with disabilities.

Step 9. Protect Workers from

Holiday Fatigue

For many businesses, the holiday season is the time for working long hours and putting in extra shifts. These time demands and stress may interfere with sleep resulting in fatigue that makes workers not only less productive but more vulnerable to errors and injuries. Best practices to prevent this:

- Train workers on the hazards, symptoms and causes of fatigue and how to minimize them;
- Objectively assess your staffing arrangements, including workers' current workloads and work hours and determine if they're contributing to fatigue;
- Analyze recent absence patterns for indications of worker fatigue;
- Arrange schedules so that workers have ample time for rest during the workday and sleep after it ends;
- Make adjustments to lighting, temperature, physical surroundings, and other aspects of the work environment to increase alertness;
- Make sleep health part of your company's wellness program; and
- Implement a [workplace fatigue risk management system](#).

Step 10. Protect Workers from Holiday Stress

The holiday season is a time of great stress for many people. Along with pressure to get things done before the end of the year, workers face significant financial demands in the months of November and December. Holiday stress can also be the result of physiological factors in the form of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a form of mental depression that impacts most individuals as sunlight gradually decreases during the fall and winter months. Best practices for [helping](#)

workers deal with stress and depression during the holidays:

- Let workers take wellness breaks so they can refocus, such as by going outside for a quick walk;
- Help workers prioritize projects and manage upcoming deadlines that may be stressing them out;
- Let workers know that they can and should stay home and not come to work when they're sick;
- Make it a priority to let workers work from home or adjust their schedules as needed to maintain an appropriate work-life balance;
- Recognize, acknowledge, and appreciate all of the worker's contributions;
- Maintain transparent and open channels of communication with workers, especially during the holidays; and
- Educate workers about financial wellness or other programs that can help them budget concerns and plan ahead for holiday expenses.