

Reducing Exposures During Work Events

Businesses host parties for a variety of reasons, including the festive season and organisational accomplishments. While these events are fun, team-building opportunities, they can create a number of risks for the hosting company. In fact, in the event that an employee is injured at the party or causes property damage, the employer is usually the one held responsible. This can lead to costly litigation and reputational harm that can affect a company for years. To avoid major losses, it's not only important for employers to secure the right insurance for every individual risk, but to also have a thorough understanding of common party exposures.

Alcohol

Anytime you throw a party for employees, employment laws still apply—even if the party is somewhere other than the workplace. This holds true when serving alcohol as well, making you or your business potentially liable should a guest's overindulgence cause harm.

While the best way to reduce alcohol liability risks is to avoid serving it altogether, this isn't always feasible. To promote the safety of your employees and guests at company-sponsored events, consider the following:

- Hold the event off-site at a restaurant or hotel.
- Provide plenty of food and non-alcoholic beverages throughout the night.
- Serve drinks to guests rather than offering a self-serve bar. Limit the amount of alcohol you will serve with a system such as a finite amount of drink tickets. Require waiters to measure spirits.

- Set up bar stations instead of having waiters circulate the room. Place table tents at each bar that remind everyone to drink responsibly.

Employers should have a thorough understanding of work event exposures and secure the right cover for every risk.

- Don't price alcohol too low, as it encourages overconsumption. Offer a range of low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks at no charge.
- Close the bar an hour before the scheduled end of the party. Do not offer a 'last orders', as this promotes rapid consumption.
- Entice guests to take advantage of safe transport options by subsidising taxis or promoting a designated driver programme.
- Consider nominating a senior manager to refrain from alcohol to help deal with any emergencies.
- Remind employees what constitutes inappropriate behaviour and to review your internal policies regarding alcohol consumption. If your company has a formal alcohol policy, ensure that you apply the same principles at the office party.

Workplace Harassment and Discrimination

Even when holding company-sponsored events off-site, employers are expected to enforce their workplace policies and safeguard their employees. In particular, employers must pay extra care to prevent issues of harassment and discrimination at their events, as they

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can lead to employment claims and costly litigation. Indeed, drink-fuelled behaviour is one of the most common causes of tribunal claims each year, according to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

To help keep employees safe at company parties, employers should ensure all of their policies related to harassment, violence, discrimination and code of conduct are up to date and account for company-sponsored events. Policies should be specific as to what is and is not tolerated. In addition, employers should:

- Consider making the event a family party where employees can bring their spouse, significant other, children or a friend. This can help deter inappropriate behaviour.
- Keep event themes and decorations appropriate. Parties should be neutral and not make reference to specific beliefs. Plan your party on a day that does not conflict with religious celebrations.
- Consider having just one entrance to your party. This will allow you to control who enters the venue and ensure that uninvited guests do not attend.
- Have supervisors chaperone the event, looking closely for inappropriate behaviour. Hire third-party security personnel as needed.
- Avoid making attendance mandatory.

Food Exposures

Food is a staple of many company-sponsored events, and can actually be a useful way to keep party guests sober and limit alcohol-related liability (starchy foods can help reduce the absorption of alcohol). However, when serving food, there are a number of risks employers should consider.

For instance, employers need to be wary of potential food allergies. In the event that a guest gets sick from the food, they could sue the employer for negligence.

To help protect against this, employers should ask party guests to disclose any of their allergies, either in their RSVP or by contacting the event coordinator

directly. In addition, you should specify what ingredients are in every food item, both on the menu and on display cards near the food itself. Remember also to make the food inclusive by providing food for those who do not eat or drink certain foods for religious reasons.

For added protection against illnesses, it's critical that employers promote safe food preparation and handling practices. Moreover, when working with a third-party provider, employers should do their due diligence to ensure they are securing reputable suppliers.

Property Damage

Property damage can occur at just about any kind of party, even small, company-sponsored events. As the host, it's your job to ensure your guests remain safe, behave appropriately, and respect the venue and its contents. To do so, employers should:

- Set behaviour expectations before the party.
- Remove valuable items from the area wherever possible. Make sure any areas that you don't want guests to enter are locked, roped off or secured.
- Review the terms of your employers' and directors' and officers' liability insurance.
- Ensure the venue is equipped to handle the number of individuals invited to the party.

Secure the Cover You Need in Advance

Even if you take all the appropriate precautions, incidents can still occur. As such, it's important for all organisations to secure adequate insurance.

Each business is different, and may require additional policies to account for all of their exposures. Contact Blackfriars Insurance Brokers Ltd today to learn about your cover options when it comes to hosting a party.