



Risk Management Considerations for Liquor Liability at Staff Parties

Staff parties can be a great way to encourage employee participation, boost morale and congratulate teams for a job well done. Unfortunately, irresponsible behaviour by a few people can upset the festivities. Any employer who sponsors an employee event has a duty of care to prevent intoxication and protect those who do become intoxicated.

While drunk driving is the most obvious exposure, it is interesting to note that other exposures such as slip and falls and fights also pose a threat.

Some examples of risk management procedures to follow include:

1. Make sure there is plenty of nutritious food such as vegetable dips, cheeses, sandwiches. You do not want guests drinking on an empty stomach.
2. Avoid too many salty snacks, which tend to make people thirsty and drink more.
3. Offer a variety of non-alcoholic beverages for the designated drivers and those who don't drink alcohol.
4. Consider providing free non-alcoholic beverages to the designated drivers.
5. Limit the number of free alcoholic beverages by the use of 'drink tickets'.
6. Do not push drinks or encourage alcohol consumption through 'drinking games'.

7. Do not let guests mix their own drinks.
8. Contract personnel with liquor service training as bartenders.
9. Appoint specific management individuals to be introduced to the bartenders and request that the bartenders alert one of these individuals when it is felt that a guest has had too much to drink.
10. Be prepared to provide guests with alternative transportation home from the party (bus tokens, taxi vouchers or designated drivers); or offer to reimburse any individual who feels that they cannot drive home but can't afford the expense of alternative transportation.

You should have an action plan ready in case a guest becomes intoxicated and resistive to any suggestions that he or she leaves the party. You could insist that this individual be escorted to and put in a taxi or have a designated driver ensure that they get home safely. Have someone else accompany the designated driver and the intoxicated individual to ensure the safety of the driver.

No one wants to put a damper on these fun and important events. It can be fairly simple to put a risk management plan in place to demonstrate that your organization conforms to the appropriate standards of care to ensure safe and enjoyable office parties.

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