



PUBLICATIONS

0012

LIQUOR LIABILITY AT HOLIDAY STAFF PARTY

*Reprinted from December 2000
COWAN NEWS*

Liability considerations

The Christmas holiday season can be one of the happiest times of the year, but irresponsible behaviour by a few people can upset the festivities. Any employer who sponsors a Christmas party type of event has a duty of care to:

- Prevent intoxication; and
- Protect intoxicated individuals.

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 you may wish to recommend include:

- Make sure there is plenty of nutritious food – vegetable dips, cheeses, finger sandwiches – so guests will not drink on empty stomachs.
- Avoid too many salty snacks, which tend to

make people thirsty and drink more;

- Offer a variety of non-alcoholic beverages for the designated driver(s) and others who prefer not to drink alcohol;
- DO NOT push drinks;
- Don't let guests mix their own drinks;
- Be prepared to provide guests with alternative transportation home from the party (i.e. bus tokens, taxi cabs 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;

- Consider providing free non-alcoholic drinks to those guests who are car pooling with a designated driver (identified by a sticker);
- 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 is drinking too much;
- Limit the number of "free" drinks through the distribution of drink tickets;
- Announce to all parties that you are providing alternative transportation and that no one should drive their vehicles if they have been drinking;
- Utilize your own or contract personnel trained in the Server Intervention Program (SIP) as bartenders.



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You should have a plan of action in the event that a guest is intoxicated and becomes resistive to any suggestions that he or she should leave the party. You could insist that these individuals be escorted to

and put in a taxi or, better yet, have a few designated drivers ensure that they get home safe.

We don't want to put a damper on this important type of event. It is fairly

simple to put a risk management plan in place to demonstrate that your organization conforms to the appropriate standards of care that exist under law and ensure a safe and happy holiday gathering. 

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