



HOW TO HOST A LIABILITY-FREE HOLIDAY OFFICE PARTY

As the temperatures begin to drop across the country, we are rolling closer and closer to the major holiday season. Companies across the country decide to celebrate the holiday season by throwing parties for their staff members. Holiday parties are often viewed by managers and human resource officials as great ways for employees to bond, to celebrate an excellent year, and to boost the morale of the company in tough times. If the holiday parties are not organized properly, they can result in litigation for the company that is unwanted. Consider the following things before planning a holiday party so that you avoid any litigation according to the [Snohomish County Business Journal](#). If a holiday party is thrown during your employees' work hours then they must be paid for attending the party, even though they will not be doing any work. This is a caveat that most employers deal with each year because they are so enamored with their employees. Plus, sometimes even managers would like to take some time off during the day to have a little fun. Should the office party occur outside of regular business hours, the employer does not have to pay the employees, so long as the employees understand that the party is voluntary. A holiday party can turn ugly quickly, especially when alcohol is thrown into the mix, so harassment can become a problem. All memos and emails regarding the party should include mentions of acting appropriately during the event, as it is a company-sponsored event, and that all harassment will be dealt with accordingly. When celebrating the holidays at the office, be sure to decorate for all of the holidays, not just one. Also, if there are employees in your office who do not celebrate any holiday, be sure to recognize them in a special way during the holiday season. The invitations to holiday parties can become tricky as well. If your office employs temporary workers, should you invite them to the party? If so, some temporary workers might get the wrong impression that they might be brought on as full-time employees. Make sure your invitation to the temporary employees makes it known that they are your guests at the event. Legally, companies are liable for any injuries and actions by employees that occur during company-sponsored events. The best way to reduce your company's liability is to not serve alcohol to your employees. Make sure that before the party occurs that your employees know how important personal responsibility is and that public drunkenness at the party will not be tolerated. Since it is an office event, any inappropriate behavior will be investigated and handled with in accordance to the company's policies. If your company is going to serve alcohol at the party, be sure to offer plenty of nonalcoholic drinks and stop serving them well before the party ends. You should also make sure your employees have a safe way to get home, either by other employees or by using taxis.

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