

AVOIDING HOLIDAY PARTY MISCONDUCT

We are now at the time of year when many offices are planning their annual holiday parties. We want to remind you of a few basic precautions which employers should take in order to avoid complaints by employees of sexual harassment or other misconduct at such parties.

1. Remind employees that normal work standard of behavior apply;
2. Remind employees to drink responsibly;
3. Make it clear that the party is a completely voluntary event;
4. Offer non-alcoholic beverages;
5. Offer designated drivers or other means of travel home;
6. Do not serve alcoholic punch;
7. Do not hang mistletoe;
8. Schedule parties on a weeknight;
9. Provide sufficient food and entertainment so that alcohol does not become the focus of the evening;
10. Review the company's insurance policy for any alcohol-related exclusions;
11. Close the bar at least an hour before the event is scheduled to end;
12. Assign management representatives to look out for intoxicated employees;
13. Invite spouses or partners, because their participation will likely discourage unacceptable behavior;
14. Remind employees before the party of the company's policies regarding sexual harassment and discrimination are in effect and will be enforced
15. Have snacks and food available throughout the party;
16. Instruct the bartenders to refuse to serve anyone who appears to be intoxicated.

Of course, to the extent you have not done so, it is not too late, or too early, to require sexual harassment training for all supervisors. In Connecticut, as well as many other locations, it is the law. To the extent you do not have a sexual harassment policy, adopt one. You may also consider purchasing employment practices liability insurance.