

Dos and Don'ts for Your Company Summer Party

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A summer party can be a great way to bring your workplace together and build camaraderie. After all, who doesn't enjoy taking a break from the office grind and spending social time with work friends? But as always, there are pitfalls for unwary employers so we've put together a tip sheet on how to avoid catastrophe at your next workplace shindig:

1. **Location, location, location.** Pick a spot that is relatively close to your main worksite and that doesn't present unusual commuting challenges. If possible, consider choosing a venue that is easily accessed via public transit to help limit the possibility that employees may drive while impaired.
2. **Focus on accessibility and inclusivity.** Unfortunately, not all bars, restaurants and event spaces are fully accessible to people in wheelchairs or others who have mobility issues. Be mindful of how accessible the venue is and, if you have any guests with special needs, make sure the venue is prepared to assist them and that they can participate fully in the event. On a similar note, when planning the group's activities it is advisable to make sure that there are various ways to get involved in the fun. Company softball games are great for those who are comfortable running and throwing a ball but many employees may have physical limitations that would not permit them to participate.
3. **Make Sure Everyone Can Eat.** Inclusivity concerns also extend to the selection of food and snacks. Keep in mind that many of your employees may have allergies or religious restrictions on what they can eat and when. We recommend reaching out to employees in advance to invite information regarding dietary restrictions to ensure that there is something for everyone at the party.
4. **Monitor and Limit Alcohol Consumption.** We recommend that companies avoid an open bar and instead provide employees with drink tickets for a limited number of alcoholic drinks. All servers should be Smart Serve certified and there should be free and enticing non-alcoholic drink options.
5. **Designate your "Grown Ups".** Every workplace has its leaders, both formal and informal. We recommend that management identify a few responsible individuals who can keep an eye on anyone who appears excessively inebriated and step in to ensure that they get home safely.
6. **Manage the Problem Child(ren).** Unfortunately, nearly every workplace also has its repeat offenders. Human resources professionals often know in advance who is likely to have too much to drink, tell off colour jokes at the party or to get bizarrely aggressive in the company ping pong tournament. Don't just cross your fingers and hope for the best. Speak to them before the party and remind them that the event is intended to be professional and fun for everyone, not just them. Remind them of any company policies regarding alcohol consumption and appropriate workplace behaviour. In extreme cases, consider telling them not to attend at all.
7. **Communicate Expectations.** Before the party begins have a member of senior management send

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an email to the whole team encouraging them to enjoy themselves at the party but reminding everyone that it is a company event and they are expected to be safe, professional and respectful of one another.

8. **Get a Waiver?** If you've ignored all our other advice about accessibility and inclusivity and have decided to organize a rock-climbing event or cliff diving party, make sure employees sign waivers confirming that they understand the risks associated with the activity and they will not hold the company liable for any injury they may suffer at the party. If you are booked at a venue that is providing equipment or machinery that will be used by your employees, make sure that they have appropriate staff on site to operate the equipment and ensure that your employees use it safely.
9. **Consider Cannabis.** With the legalization of recreational cannabis in Canada, employers now have to consider whether or not they will permit employees to use cannabis at their social gatherings. When deciding what is right for your event, consider whether or not you are providing transportation to the venue, the nature of the activities planned and review the rules of the venue itself. We recommend keeping the focus on preventing safety issues due to impairment, regardless of whether or not alcohol or cannabis is the culprit.
10. **Don't Plan a Pool Party.** Just don't.

This publication is a general summary of the law. It does not replace legal advice tailored to your specific circumstances.