

INFORMATION SHEET

Enjoy your Christmas Celebrations ... but be careful

With Christmas only weeks away many businesses will be thinking about organising their annual Christmas party.

The Christmas party is generally an enjoyable occasion, but employers should be aware that whenever and wherever the Christmas party is held, the employer remains responsible for the well being and safety of their employees. Ensuring appropriate standards of behaviour and safety will assist in avoiding unpleasant claims.

You may be liable if an employee is sexually harassed at the Christmas party. The Christmas party is a work function. You should remind your employees of your company policy on sexual harassment prior to the function.

While over indulgence in alcohol is generally the cause of Christmas workplace problems, even employees just exchanging 'Kris Kringle' gifts sometimes causes problems. Try to discourage employees from giving gifts that can be perceived as "embarrassing".

Here are some tips to assist you:

- Tell your employees, in writing, that you want everyone to have a good time and that you expect them to behave responsibly. Warn employees that they should exercise restraint in the consumption of alcohol. Consider making cab vouchers available for staff to get home from the party or call for volunteer drivers among staff who don't drink alcohol.
- Do not allow anyone from your Company to serve alcohol to staff, and advise bartenders not to serve anyone who seems intoxicated.

- Make sure plenty of soft drinks and water is available, and that food is served.
- Do not make the function compulsory, and don't insist that staff have an alcoholic drink as part of their "networking obligations". This could be seen as part of the job requirements and the employer may be liable if there is any accident on the way home.
- If Christmas celebrations are held in the office, the person serving alcohol must be covered by an RSA licence and must not consume alcohol before or during the event.
- You must be specific and provide a start and finish time for the party. If your invitation state 8-late, you may still be liable for anything that happens after the party.

Remember, most Christmas celebrations are enjoyed by all.