

Making Christmas safe and fun for your staff

1. SAFETY COMES FIRST

To help reduce the risk of injury or claims for negligence, business owners should ensure care is taken when putting up Christmas decorations in the premises. Use suitable step ladders rather than standing on desks or balancing on wheelie chairs. Make someone responsible for a thorough check of the premises when everyone has left; all electrical equipment is switched off and/or disconnected; windows and doors are closed and locked; water supply off at the mains to avoid any leakages from burst pipes if the heating is switched off and the weather is cold.

2. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

Allow sufficient time to inform staff about Christmas party arrangements and ensure everyone understands that the party is a work event - not just a night out with their mates! e.g. gently remind them about the consequences of poor behaviour and that you expect them to be at work on time the next-working day.

3. PROMOTE SENSIBLE BEHAVIOUR

Alcohol consumption can often be instrumental in the cause of accidents, inappropriate behaviour and even breaking the law through drunken driving. Make sure you have a range of enticing non-alcohol alternatives – “cocktail creativity” to help moderate alcohol intake. If possible have a trusted member of staff, to keep an eye on proceedings and have a quiet word, should things look to be getting out of hand.

You want people to relax and enjoy themselves but the informal atmosphere, especially when combined with alcohol, can cause a change in the way some staff interact with their colleagues. One person’s idea of “a bit of fun” may not be appreciated by another. Avoid causing offence by ensuring staff understand levels of acceptable behaviour and what may constitute sexual harassment so that everyone can respect personal boundaries.

You might also consider arrangements for safe transport home after the party, such as a mini bus to the local train station. Heavy drinking the night before will make people unfit for driving the next day.

4. MANAGE SOCIAL MEDIA

When there is drink involved, office antics could quickly become the focus of internet scrutiny. Businesses need to implement necessary controls so drunken tweets don’t damage your reputation. It’s essential to ensure that proper policies are in place to cover you in the event that a staff member posts embarrassing images or comments about clients. If you don’t have a social media policy, you may wish to create one, or add it to your existing disciplinary policy. In which case, you’ll need to inform your staff of the new addition to your company’s policies in writing, and tell them where they can access it. This way there can be no confusion should disciplinary action be needed.

5. DEALING WITH EXTRA STRESS AT CHRISTMAS

Not everyone approaches the festive season with the same enthusiasm. Stress levels can really rise at this time of year. Whether it’s the financial pressures of Christmas - especially if they have children -, or concern for elderly and vulnerable relatives, the additional stress can take its toll on people’s health and wellbeing. There are many ways in which an employer’s empathetic investment in people can pay dividends. e.g. giving staff time off to visit distant relatives or refer someone to the CAB or Money Advice Service.

We have found that with effective planning of festivities everyone can safely enjoy the Christmas period... and celebrate a terrific close to the year – you’ve earned it!

Happy Christmas. I hope we can help you during 2020

