

Enjoy your Christmas Celebrations ... 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 legal claims.

By law, an employer may be liable if an employee is sexually harassed at the Christmas party by another employee. If an incident of sexual harassment occurs whether at the worksite or off site, if it is work-related then the employer can be held responsible. It is wise to ensure that a copy of the company policy on sexual harassment is well-known to all employees.

Whilst 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 employers in managing their Christmas celebrations:

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 caution in regard to the consumption of alcohol. Consider making cab vouchers available for staff to get home from the party or call for volunteer drivers amongst 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 there are plenty of soft drinks available and make sure 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.

Remember, most Christmas celebrations are enjoyed by all.



Eliminating Workplace Bullying is Good Business Practice.

Workplace bullying may be defined as 'any less favourable treatment of an employee by others in the workplace. It can include behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates an employee.'

It can range from very obvious verbal assault to more subtle psychological abuse. It usually occurs where one party holds a position of power and it can occur between an employee and a supervisor or between co-employees. Behaviours include yelling and screaming or using offensive language, excluding or isolating employees, intimidation, giving employees impossible tasks, deliberately inconveniencing employees or undermining work performance.

Workplace bullying can have serious economic effects on a workplace. It can result in decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, staff turnover and low morale.

Everyone has a right to work in an environment that is free from bullying, harassment and violence. It is advisable to incorporate a policy on workplace bullying in policy manuals and to keep reminding employees that a workplace that is free from bullying is a productive and healthy work environment.

MGA has produced a policy on workplace bullying and this is available on our website or call our Workplace advisers for further details.

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