



Now that the festive holiday season is upon us, employers are throwing holiday business parties as a way to celebrate with clients and employees. But if alcohol is being provided, you must be aware that you may be exposed to liabilities as the social host.

The Courts have imposed a high standard of care on employers as social hosts, holding them liable for injuries to their intoxicated guests as well as for injuries to third parties caused by the actions of their intoxicated guests. The Courts have awarded large damages payments where social host employers failed to meet this standard of care.

If you are hosting a holiday party where alcohol will be served, there are steps that you can take to be a good social host while limiting your potential liability:

- As the host, drink minimally or not at all so that you stay in control of any situation that may arise.
- Hire a professional bartender, rather than allowing guests to serve themselves, so that alcohol consumption may be monitored. Advise the bartender to stop serving drinks to guests when they appear to be consuming too much alcohol.
- Ensure that plenty of food is being served, so that alcohol is absorbed more slowly.
- Have a wide variety of non-alcoholic drinks available, such as punch, mocktails, and rum-free eggnog.
- Stop serving alcoholic drinks an hour or two before the gathering is to end by closing the bar, and bring out coffee, more food and more non-alcoholic drinks.
- Make sure your guests have planned for a safe drive home. Know who their designated driver is and do not serve them any alcohol.
- Have taxi vouchers available for guests to use, and ensure that guests are aware of their availability.
- Intervene if necessary and take away the keys of guests who are intoxicated.
- Take common sense precautions. Remember that alcohol can lead to inappropriate and unsafe behaviour even from those whom you least expect it.

The keys to a successful holiday season are fun, safety and good judgment. If you have any questions about social host liability, please contact us.