



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Holiday Work-Party Safety

This is the season for holiday office parties. Many companies will be hosting events to enjoy time with staff, and whether the party happens in the workplace or off-site, there are some things that all employees should keep in mind to avoid potential problems.

Don't Be a Statistic

Every holiday season, hundreds of lives are lost due to drunk drivers. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, over the past 5 years, an average of 300 people died in drunk driving crashes the week between Christmas and New Year. In 2016, 781 people lost their lives in drunk-driving-related crashes in the month of December alone.

There is an increase in fatal DUI accidents around the holidays because not only do people drink more, but there are more cars on the road, more people driving late at night, and, during the Christmas season, in bad weather. Law enforcement agencies recognize these dangerous and deadly risk factors, and nationwide they step up patrols during the holiday season and driving under the influence arrests increase. The number of DUI-related traffic stops often increases by 33% on Christmas Eve as a result of overindulgence at holiday parties.

One of the deadliest and most often committed—yet preventable—of crimes (impaired driving) has become a serious epidemic in our country that worsens during the holiday season. Help reduce the toll of drunk driving by never drinking and driving.

Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over

No one should overconsume, but if you do find yourself in an unsafe condition to drive, get a safe ride with a sober driver or use the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's SafeRide app to call a taxi or friend to be picked up. The app is available for Android devices on Google Play and Apple devices on the iTunes store. Remember to celebrate the holiday responsibly. Never drink and drive.

Be Safe and Protect Your Reputation

It is important that we all drive safely and sober, especially during the holiday season, but mixing alcohol or other drugs with coworkers and the stress of the holidays can end up causing more problems than DUI accidents and arrests for some employees.

According to industry surveys, about 15% of employers that have hosted holiday parties say that inappropriate employee behavior at those parties has impacted an individual's career growth in the company. But even if someone's bad party behavior does not damage their livelihood, it could end up being the focus of embarrassing next-day office gossip.

The following are some tips to help avoid embarrassment and protect your reputation.

It is a good idea to eat at least a little bit before and during the party, especially if you plan on drinking. It's never a good idea to drink alcoholic beverages on an empty

stomach. Too often at holiday office parties, people who don't drink at other times of the year are more likely to drink without recognizing that their low tolerance has caused a higher level of inebriation than they think. Drinking and not eating can speed up the impairment process. And be careful if you are going to drink punch served at any holiday party. Always ask what is in the beverage, because if it is a mystery, you may be consuming far more alcohol than you realize.

Too often, employees feel that they need to indulge in several drinks to combat shyness or nervousness they may be feeling about the office party, but it's better to be a little quiet and shy than to become inebriated and act foolish. No one wants their coworkers to see them in a compromising position.

If you are going to drink, limit drinks with alcohol to a maximum of two. But be aware that no matter what type of alcohol is being consumed, it delivers the same effects. A person who consumes 6 ounces of wine receives the same amount of alcohol as a person who drinks 12 ounces of beer and will experience the same effects as the person who drinks 1.5 ounces of hard liquor, such as whiskey. Avoid mixing drinks, and be sure to drink nothing but coffee, tea, soft drinks, or water during the last hour of the party. If you will be driving, don't operate a motor vehicle if you feel that you are impaired in any way.

Some of your coworkers may want to go out after the party ends, and

if you've been controlling your alcohol intake, it might be okay to go with them. But don't let yourself be talked into going to a third location (like a bar or other drinking establishment). By that time, most people in the group will have become more focused on heavy drinking and "partying"—and that's when serious problems can occur. And of course, never get into a vehicle with a driver who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

You also don't want to see after-party photos of you on social media that highlight unbecoming behavior. For the same reasons that you would not post negative opinions about your company or its holiday party on Facebook or Twitter, be sure to prevent that from happening to you.

If the work-party takes place on an evening before a workday, be sure to go in to work the next day. You don't want coworkers gossiping that you drank too much the night before and couldn't make it in to work.

Have Fun Responsibly

Drinking over the holidays and at office parties is a common part of many celebrations, and there is nothing wrong with wanting to relax with family, friends, and coworkers. But for those who choose to drink, it's important to be aware of their own safety and the safety of others. Having a plan in place for responsible drinking—whether it's taking a cab home, calling for a ride, or choosing not to get behind the wheel after indulging at home—can be the difference between a safe holiday and one that jeopardizes you and others on the road.