

# Make sure your firm's Christmas Party isn't a festive fiasco!



Mark Ridley, head Solicitor of our Employment Department, advises employers everywhere put the last-minute touches to their plans for the office Christmas party, a local solicitor has highlighted some of the legal issues that can rapidly turn the season of goodwill into a festive fiasco.

“Make no mistake, if things go wrong it can be one of the most potentially explosive events of the year,” warns Mark. “Businesses need to consider a range of issues to make absolutely certain that they are not flirting with a host of legal problems.”

These can begin well before the party itself. For example, when inviting staff, be sensitive to other people's religious beliefs and do not insist that they attend this celebration of a Christian festival.

When putting up decorations, ensure that health and safety rules are followed – provide your people with stepladders so that they don't climb on to dangerous swivel chairs. Make sure that they do not cover emergency exit signs with paper chains, and that they avoid festooning heat sources like computers with tinsel.

“When the party gets underway, try to ensure that under-18s do not drink alcohol,” Mark continues. “Remember too, that if you provide free drink, you may be held responsible for encouraging drunken behaviour. You should also ensure that everyone understands the need to behave themselves under the mistletoe – claims for sexual harassment are not uncommon.”

Mark also recommends making travel arrangements to help people get home safely after the event. “As the party's host, the employer has a duty of care. So you might decide to end the party before public transport stops running, or encourage the use of local taxi firms,” he says.

“Above all though, concentrate on making sure that everyone has a good time. A party where everything goes well – and these are the vast majority – is a great way of engendering staff loyalty. So Happy Christmas!”

“Our employment law experts are very happy to discuss the best ways of preparing for change. Anyone with concerns should feel free to call us for advice and speak to the Department's PA, Sue Mace, either by telephone 024 7663 2121 or email Sue on [sue.mace@bandhatton.co.uk](mailto:sue.mace@bandhatton.co.uk).