

## News Release

October 21 2009

### **Excessive Christmas party spirits will cost unprepared employers**

UK employers could face sizeable compensation claims if they fail to protect themselves sufficiently ahead of seasonal office parties, warns James Wilders, an employment law partner at national law firm Dickinson Dees.

He said: “Employers often find themselves experiencing a costly hangover when employees’ behaviour at parties gets out of hand. Many don’t realise they are legally responsible for the behaviour of their employees in a working environment, and this includes the Christmas party.

“However, it is relatively straightforward for employers to protect themselves – for instance they should issue clear guidelines to staff outlining expectations in behaviour before the event.

“Because of the wide-ranging employment rights laws, whose number and scope increases every year, liability can arise in an increasing number of ways. For instance, unwelcome advances by one of the people towards a colleague could lead to a sexual harassment claim. Clear instructions on standards of behaviour are the best defence for employers, particularly if communicated well in advance. Racist and sexist jokes are also dangerous – so don’t invite Jim Davidson as the entertainment!”

#### **Alcohol**

Christmas parties invariably involve lots of alcohol, but it does increase the risk of aggressive behaviour, and the risk of claims against the employer with it. Employers need to have a plan to deal with a situation should it get out of hand.

#### **Showing the way to go home**

Even after the party goes without a hitch, there is still one more hurdle to jump. How are people getting home if they have drunk too much ? Arguably an employer is responsible for post-party staff travel arrangements, particularly if alcohol is available. Even failed claims can take up lots of time and resources, so consider organising shuttles or taxis to ferry everyone home safely at end.”

#### **The morning after**

“The following day, employees may take a day’s sick leave from hangovers. Regrettably for employers, they are unable to set rules against this, as it would be difficult to discern between true illness and a banging hangover. Make it clear well in advance that all employees are expected at work the next day, and consider how long the bar stays open! If you let people drink until 1am, you only have yourself to blame if most don’t show up the next day!”

- Ends -

### **About Dickinson Dees**

Dickinson Dees is one of the UK's leading full-service law firms. With offices in London and North East of England and nearly 700 staff, the firm provides legal services to corporate, commercial, public sector and private clients across the UK. These include the Go-Ahead Group plc, the London Borough of Croydon, Govia Limited and various NHS Trusts.

Dickinson Dees' team of employment law specialists provides organisations with highly-effective and commercially-sound solutions across a range of employment law issues. The practice has great experience in dealing with large and complex employment tribunal cases, as well as matters such as equal pay, union recognition, discrimination issues and advice to employment agency clients.

### **For more information please contact:**

#### **Sam Pepper/George Baldwin**

Kelso Consulting (PR Advisers to Dickinson Dees)

Phone: 020 7242 2272

Email: [GeorgeB@KelsoPR.com](mailto:GeorgeB@KelsoPR.com)