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TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

- Pennsylvania Casinos Struggle with Underage Gambling Issues
- Introduction of 50p minimum unit price for alcohol in Wales approved in Assembly vote
- Amazon Go, the cashierless retail store of the future, has some new competition (excerpt)
- Spike in on-campus students may have caused increase in drug, alcohol referrals
- Don't Let Your Company Holiday Party Become a Liability

CONTROL STATE NEWS

PA: Pennsylvania Casinos Struggle with Underage Gambling Issues

US Gambling Sites
November 12, 2019

In every state across the US, casinos operate on specific rules and regulations. While every states will vary based on what is and is not allowed, there is one thing each have in common; underage gambling is a big no-no. Casinos are restricted to player 21 years of age or older and every person is to be carded before gaining entry. However, the restriction does not keep the younger crowd from trying or gaining entry into the casino. In Pennsylvania, the gaming venues of the state continue to struggle with underage issues and find it challenging to keep the young people from gaining entry.

Discussing the Issue

The most recent state gaming board meeting highlighted the underage gambling problem in the state. Several casinos have been fined due to the issue including most recently the Mohegan Sun Pocono. The venue was fined \$110,000 by the board due to several incidents involving gamblers under the age of 21 gaining access to the floor.

One instance was considered quite serious as a female was able to enter the casino seven times in a week time frame in late December, early January. She was able to not only play slot machines and table games but was given alcohol a total of 11 times. For gameplay, the young female spent 52 hours gambling.

Surprisingly, during her time at the venue, she was given three player cards. A total of eight transactions were completed at the cash cage. The reason she was able to do so much as that an ID of another individual was used. The picture on the ID closely resembled the player. She was actually carded more than 30 times and was not caught in the act.

While the Mohegan Sun realizes that the multiple incidents involving the female are serious, they did point out during the meeting that 31 different employees felt she looked old enough and like the person on the ID to let it go.

The casino was accused of different incidents of allowing players to enter under the age of 21, with security guards either failing to card people or did not stop them when the ID said under 21. Surprisingly, the fine against the Mohegan Sun was the 10th time the property has been cited for underage gambling.

A Big Problem

Since 2006, the Gaming Control Board of the state has enforced 80 actions against casinos for underage gambling infractions. The issue remains a hot topic of debate and the biggest problem for operators. Next to underage gambling, the casinos have issues with self-excluded players gaining access to games as well as table game regulation violations.

According to Pennbets.com, of the 80 fines, the price tag comes to over \$3.2 million. Along with the Mohegan Sun, the Wind Creek Bethlehem Casino and the Hollywood Casino have violated the underage regulations with 10 penalties each.

While it seems the casinos are having major problems, they are also turning away those who try to enter and are under age. The facility reportedly turned away close to 1,400 people this year alone. With hundreds of thousands of players visiting the facility annually, this is a solid chunk and shows the security and casino officials are trying to keep underage players from accessing the gaming floor.

The best way to tackle the problem seems to be ensuring entry points are covered and every individual is carded. Any discrepancies in the ID should be considered and great care taken to ensure fake IDs or other people's IDs are not being used.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Finland: Study: more young people trying cannabis, but not alcohol or cigarettes

Up to 31% of grade 9 students say they never or hardly use any alcohol, and even fewer smoke - but experimenting with cannabis is seen as low risk,

News Now

By News Now Staff

November 12, 2019

Young people in Finland are drinking less alcohol and smoking fewer cigarettes, but they're experimenting more regularly with cannabis.

That's the findings of a new study released Tuesday by the National Institute for Health and Welfare THL.

Alcohol consumption falls, in line with patterns in other Nordic countries for young people.

Binge drinking has continued declining among boys, but this drop seems to have halted among girls. At the turn of the century, around half of the young people had drunk at least six portions of alcohol at once during the previous 30 days. In 2019, only 22% of young people did this. The differences in binge drinking between boys and girls are minor.

Up to 31% of grade 9 students say they never or hardly use any alcohol, and even fewer smoke – just 7% of ninth graders now report smoking daily, compared with 25% just 20 years ago.

Researchers also found a drop in snuff use, which soared among boys in recent years, although girls use snuff more frequently than before.

'Low risk' cannabis use growing in Finland among young people

Researchers found that cannabis use is on the rise.

In 1995 just 5% of boys had tried cannabis, while now it has risen to 13%. The corresponding figures for girls were 5% in 1995 and 9% today.

"The frequently presented view that an increase in cannabis use could be caused by a reduction in alcohol consumption does not appear to hold true, at least among under-aged people" says THL Senior Researcher Kirsimarja Raitasalo.

An increasing number of young people also believe that only few or no risks are related to using cannabis, and more of them believe that it is easy to obtain cannabis according to the study.

"During the entire observation period, cannabis use has been more common among the young people who use alcohol, particularly those regularly engaged in binge drinking, compared to those abstaining from alcohol use. It appears that cannabis has not replaced alcohol, but has instead been adopted alongside it" she explains.

This research was carried out in Finland as part of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD). The study has been conducted every fourth year since 1995 in 23 to 39 European countries.

United Kingdom: Introduction of 50p minimum unit price for alcohol in Wales approved in Assembly vote

Deeside

November 13, 2019

The Welsh Government will introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol of 50p from 2 March 2020, with regulations today being approved by the National Assembly for Wales.

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 will mean that it will be an offence for alcohol to be supplied below that price in Wales.

In Wales there are 60,000 admissions to hospital every year, because of alcohol. Alcohol costs the NHS £159 million annually. In 2018, there were 535 alcohol-related deaths in Wales.

The new law supports the Welsh Government's comprehensive work to tackle harmful and hazardous drinking by tackling the availability and affordability of cheap, strong alcohol, which is part of wider efforts to improve and protect the health of the population of Wales.

Research estimates that introducing a 50p minimum unit price (MUP) would:

- result in 66 fewer deaths and 1,281 fewer hospital admissions in Wales per year

- would save the Welsh NHS more than £90 million over 20 years, in direct healthcare costs

- would reduce workplace absence, which is estimated to fall by up to 9,800 days per year

- over a 20 year period, the introduction of a MUP could contribute £783 million to the Welsh economy in terms of the reduction in alcohol-related illness, crime and workplace absence.

A recent report from a consortium of researchers including Figure 8 Consultancy Services Ltd, the University of South Wales and Glyndwr University has shown the introduction of a 50p minimum unit price for alcohol in Wales is unlikely to see drinkers switching to other substances or drugs.

This is something which will be monitored closely once the legislation is implemented.

The Welsh Government is working with service providers and healthcare professionals to ensure information about the policy is available, and the appropriate services are in place to support people.

A national communications campaign will also launch ahead of the introduction of a minimum price for alcohol to make the public, retailers and those effected by the change aware.

Health Minister, Vaughan Gething, said:

"There is a very real and clear link between levels of excessive drinking and the availability of cheap alcohol.

We believe the introduction of a minimum unit price will help reduce alcohol related harm and support people to drink responsibly.

Scotland has seen a decline in the amount of alcohol that is consumed since the introduction of MUP and I hope that we will see similar results in Wales."

Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Dr Frank Atherton said:

"We want to reduce alcohol related harm and deaths in Wales. Nearly 1 in 5 adults are drinking above the safe guideline of 14 units per week. Binge drinking a large quantity of cheap alcohol is particularly damaging on people's health and has a huge impact on NHS resources.

Australia: Can your smartphone help you stop drinking?

A social media application to help people curb their drinking is generating big savings for businesses through less absenteeism.

Financial Review

By Andrew Tillett, Political Correspondent

November 13, 2019

AUSTRALIA - As Australians and their livers prepare to endure another festive season, a new study claims an online community aimed at helping people curb their drinking is saving \$32 million as workers take fewer days off because of hangovers.

Committed users of the Daybreak smartphone app have also cut their spending on alcohol consumption by an average of \$7000 annually, while taxpayers are seeing gains from lower healthcare and law enforcement costs.

All up, Daybreak is generating a 149 per cent return to the Australian economy for every dollar of the Federal Government's \$3 million investment, prompting supporters to lobby Canberra for an increase in funding as an alternative to overstretched rehabilitation services.

The app is the brainchild of former nightclub promoter Chris Raine, whose year off drinking 10 years ago was the catalyst to establish Hello Sunday Morning, an organisation dedicated to changing Australians' relationship with alcohol.

The app, which the government subsidises by \$150 per user, offers one-on-one sessions with health

coaches, tips on changing habits and peer support to help people cut back on drinking.

An earlier study by Curtin University researchers found that users who stuck with the app for at least three months reduced their drinking from 37 standard drinks a week to 17.

Economic consultancy Evaluate used that data to produce its report, to be released on Wednesday, that showed the app had reduced absenteeism by \$32 million among its 20,000 users.

It also saw users stop spending \$53 million on drinks, based on an average price of \$7 per standard drink and 20 fewer drinks a week. For users who used the app for at least three months, this annual saving was \$7000.

The study, which was funded by the Vodafone Foundation, suggests that users and taxpayers have saved almost \$7.5 million from the cost of healthcare, fewer road accidents and less call on police resources for alcohol-related crime.

Advertising mogul and Hello Sunday Morning patron Harold Mitchell urged Canberra to help more Australians access the Daybreak app.

"Daybreak is a cost-effective solution that actually provides returns to the economy. Health Minister Greg Hunt has an exceptional opportunity to scale this so thousands of Australians can get effective and proven help to change their relationship with alcohol," he said.

INDUSTRY NEWS

Amazon Go, the cashierless retail store of the future, has some new competition (excerpt)

CNBC

November 12, 2019

Nobody likes waiting in line at the checkout counter, whether it is waiting for a human cashier or one of the newer, self-checkout registers where patrons often struggle with the scan-and-go technology's hiccups. It's one more unsolved issue for an already embattled retail store sector — and one more opportunity for Amazon.

The cashierless-store concept popularized by the Amazon Go store — which Jeff Bezos' company has

major plans to expand across the U.S. — allows customers to pick up all of the items they need and then simply walk out the door. Skipping the checkout entirely, shoppers are sent a receipt of their purchases through the Amazon Go app (a necessity to enter) after leaving the store.

While Amazon may be the biggest name in the market, it isn't the only player. Two tech start-ups, AiFi and Grabango, are working on autonomous systems for big retailers doing battle with Amazon in a mounting checkout-less technology war.

"When you have a strong leader in the market like Amazon, it creates a level of cultural awareness that can help kind of set the market," said Andrew Lipsman, principal analyst for eMarketer. "And then you have other providers who are enabling the technology to compete with Amazon, so very quickly you can see how the whole market will move quickly over the next two or three years."

Walmart is not ceding this new shopping approach to Amazon, either, as the retail giant has been testing technology, including its "fast lane" app-based checkout in Canada, and other systems being tried within its Intelligent Retail Lab effort. Walmart's Sam's Club has already successfully deployed scan-and-go shopping technology.

AB InBev's Craft Brew Buyout to Boost Craft Beer Portfolio (excerpt)

Yahoo!

Zacks Equity Research

November 12, 2019

Anheuser-Busch InBev SA/NV BUD, alias AB InBev, remains keen on capitalizing on opportunities to expand in the craft beer space. In sync, the company has signed an agreement to buy the remaining stake of Craft Brew Alliance Inc. BREW, in which it already holds 31.2% interest. The merger deal, which is valued at \$321 million or \$16.50 per share, marks an extension of the partnership of more than 25 years between AB InBev and Craft Brew.

The companies expect to close the deal by 2020, after receipt of approval from Craft Brew's shareholders and the satisfaction of other regulatory conditions.

Absolut partners Siemens to enhance manufacturing efficiency

Drinks Insight
November 13, 2019

The Absolut Company, makers of premium vodka, has collaborated with Siemens Digital Industries Software to deploy its technology to streamline production value chain.

As part of the initiative, the company will initially test Siemens Opcenter Execution software at its three manufacturing facilities in Åhus, engaged in the production of spirits distributed worldwide.

The Absolut Company operations vice-president Anna Schreil said: “The Absolut Company always strives to have best in class manufacturing where Industry 4.0 will be a key enabler to deliver on future consumer demands. We are happy to have Siemens Digital Industries Software as a key partner on this journey.”

Siemens claims that its Opcenter solution will help The Absolut Company to cope with challenges in the beverage market, such as an increase in the demand for its products, as well as meet specific production challenges.

The technology vendor notes that its Opcenter solution has been designed to cover the entire value chain of the consumer-packaged goods as well as food and beverage industries.

Additionally, Siemens’ Opcenter Execution Process can help the vodka manufacturing firm to increase traceability, manage orders and monitor production in real-time.

Siemens Digital Industries Software Nordic operations vice president and managing director Mats Friberg said: “Companies across the consumer products industry are facing increased regulations, the need for global manufacturing to meet local demands, and competitive pressures that can result in reduced margins.

“The Absolut Company recognises the key to staying ahead in this changing industry is through digitalization. We value the trust placed in our solutions and will be a responsive partner to The Absolut Company as it continues to move towards a digital enterprise.”

EDUCATION NEWS

Spike in on-campus students may have caused increase in drug, alcohol referrals

The Commonwealth Times
By Hannah Eason, News Editor
November 12, 2019

What started as a party in his Rhoads dorm room ended with the cops banging on his door because of a noise complaint. After telling an officer that he drank one beer, Brian was given a court summons and a student conduct referral.

Brian, who asked to remain anonymous to speak openly about his experience, was charged with drinking underage in a dorm during his freshman year.

“I was told that if I had one more mess up, then I would have been kicked out at VCU,” said Brian, who was on VCU probation for a year and was “hesitant to go out afterward.”

The number of student referrals for drug and alcohol offenses increased between 2017 and 2018 while arrests went down, according to the VCU Annual Security Report released earlier this semester.

Liquor law referrals went up slightly on campus and in residential facilities. On Monroe Park campus, there was an increase from 97 to 118 referrals on campus, and all but one were in residential facilities. Drug abuse referrals had a larger increase, from 44 on campus in 2017 to 111 on campus in 2018. Almost all occurred in residential facilities.

Brian, who is a junior psychology major, said he was more angry at himself throughout the process than anything. He remembered his dad telling him, “you better not make all this tuition money be for nothing.”

“Being put on probation really didn’t hit home like my dad telling me to not like mess this shit up,” Brian said.

Police do not process student referrals, but every student who is arrested goes through a conduct process through the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity. A liquor law arrest is considered any possession of an open container of alcohol, underage possession of alcohol or possession of

alcohol by an interdicted person. Under Virginia statute, an interdicted person is one who is considered to be a “habitual drunkard.”

Drug abuse arrests, which include citations for paraphernalia, went down on campus and on public property but increased slightly in residential housing.

In 2018, out of 165 drug abuse arrests, 88 were on campus. Of those 88 arrests, 75 were in on-campus housing. When GRC Phases I and II reopened in August 2018, the number of on-campus, first-year students increased by almost 1,500.

“We’re kind of looking at GRC reopening, increasing that population of on-campus students,” said VCU police spokeswoman Corey Byers. “So we believe that that is what that number is tied to.”

Byers said the numbers are not double counted, and if a student receives an arrest and a referral, they would only be counted as an arrest in the crime report numbers.

VCU has a zero-tolerance policy against alcohol, which VCU Police Captain Jonathan Siok says is largely to prevent sexual assault and alcohol poisoning.

“It’s not because we want to come out here and arrest students or anything like that,” Siok said. “Honestly, most of our officers don’t want to do that anyway. We know that it can affect their academic career.”

VCU Police operates in concurrent jurisdiction with Richmond Police, which means both forces can make arrests on campus.

“Since we have such a great relationship with the city, a lot of times when they come in contact with a student, they call us,” Siok said. “Now that’s not just in our jurisdiction, but maybe outside just a little bit since we’ve expanded our jurisdiction, into more of an internal jurisdiction.”

Karen Belanger, director of student conduct and academic integrity, said much of the student conduct process is meant to be educational.

“Disciplinary probation at the university is very different than criminal probation,” Belanger said. “We’re not applying supervision to the probation, we’re not applying drug testing to probation. It’s not

monitored in the same way the courts may with a student.”

Student Conduct decides punishments — which can range from censure to expulsion — on a case by case basis. Belanger says when dealing with drugs and alcohol, this can include variables like quantity, behavior at the time of arrest, the type of drug and if there was an intent to distribute.

“Students are entitled to due process. So just because somebody is documented in a report either by a staff member or the university police doesn’t necessarily mean that they violated the policy,” Belanger said. “So we don’t go into the conversation assuming that they have.”

On the MCV campus, liquor law arrests and referrals saw almost no change. In 2018, there were fewer than 10 liquor law arrests and referrals combined.

There were six drug abuse referrals at MCV in 2018, all of which occurred in residential facilities. There was a decrease in drug abuse arrests between 2017 and 2018, from 90 to 59, including arrests in MCV hospitals.

Numbers listed in the VCU Annual Crime Report do not include public intoxication or DUIs.

Washington State University fraternity member's death may have been alcohol-related, investigators say

FOX News

By Vandana Rambaran | Fox News

November 13, 2019

Alcohol may be to blame for the death of a fraternity brother at Washington State University (WSU), investigators said, as the school on Tuesday suspended all fraternity and sorority events in the interim.

Members of Alpha Tau Omega called 911 after a 19-year-old fraternity member -- whose identity has not yet been released -- was found unresponsive. Students at the house tried to perform CPR to no avail, NBC News reported.

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When first responders arrived at the off-campus house at around 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, the teenager was unconscious and not breathing, Pullman Police Operations Commander Jake Opgenorth said, according to reports by KREM. Medics later pronounced the student dead.

The Whitman County Coroner's office has not yet released the official cause of death. Police said alcohol may have played a role, but did not elaborate.

"In response to this situation, all fraternities and sororities within the WSU Greek community have self-imposed an immediate suspension of all social events for the remainder of the semester," WSU spokesman Phil Weiler said in a news release.

This was not the first time WSU's fraternities have come under scrutiny; in October 2016, a 21-year-old WSU student was found dead inside of a bedroom at the Pi Kappa Phi fraternity house. The medical examiner's office determined the student died of intoxication from a combination of methadone and alprazolam, also known as Xanax.

Days ago, a 19-year-old freshman at San Diego State University (SDSU) died after leaving a frat party, investigators said.

A roommate of Dylan Hernandez called police after he discovered Hernandez did not have a pulse when he returned to the residence hall. Paramedics rushed him to a hospital last Thursday, and he died Sunday.

His specific cause of death was unclear.

Following his death, SDSU suspended 14 of its fraternities as a university police investigation revealed allegations "that a fraternity was involved in possible misconduct."

DAILY NEWS

What does drinking alcohol actually do to your driving?

The Telegraph
By Tim Gibson
November 13, 2019

As the party season approaches, it's important to understand exactly how alcohol consumption impacts yours and others' safety

Everyone knows that driving under the influence of alcohol is a bad idea. That is why most countries have legal drink-drive limits, ensuring the safety of all road users.

As we begin the countdown to the festive party season, here's a timely reminder of the impact alcohol has on your driving – and that of other road users.

1. Reduced reaction times

Drinking reduces the speed with which you react to changes in road conditions. This makes an accident more likely, and explains why around 9,000 accidents each year involve drink drivers.

"Even if you're within the legal drink-drive limit in England and Wales, it adds 13 per cent to your reaction time," says Simon Turner, who heads the government-backed Driving for Better Business campaign. "Go over the limit, and that delay gets even greater, meaning you're a real danger to yourself and other road users."

2. Distraction

A major factor in the delayed reaction time is the increased tendency of drink-drivers to become distracted. As this 2014 study explains, over-the-limit drivers are much less vigilant when behind the wheel, because their mind is less focused on the job at hand.

"Alcohol may be a depressant, but it causes many people to lose focus," explains Mr Turner. "If you're responsible for the safety of yourself and other road users, you want to be completely attentive to the world around you. Drinking alcohol makes it much less likely that you'll spot danger and have enough time to react."

3. Over-confident

Everyone knows that drinking alcohol can also cause a surge in confidence. You can become a lot less inhibited as the drink takes effect, giving you a false sense of invincibility.

That's great if you're about to sing karaoke at the office Christmas party, but not good news if you're driving home. Being over-confident may make you more likely to take risks, putting yourself and other people in danger. So do yourself and others a big

favour: take the bus or walk instead. The fresh air will do you good.

4. Hazard perception

Even with just 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood in their system (the Scottish drink-drive limit), a study of the impact of alcohol consumption on hazard perception showed a marked trend. Drivers who had been drinking were less able to spot danger. And when they did identify a hazard, they responded more abruptly, thereby increasing the chances of an accident.

“We all know that drinking makes us less able to spot danger or control our reactions,” says Clive Todd, a DSA-approved driving instructor and owner of Somerset Trailer Training. “As an experiment, I once had a go on my son’s driving simulator after drinking a couple of pints of lager. It made a huge difference to my performance and was a sobering lesson – quite literally.”

5. Expect the unexpected

Of course, staying sober while driving is only a part of the challenge, especially during the festive party season. You also need to be aware of other drivers, who may not be as careful as you are.

“People have a few drinks and feel they can take on the world,” says Mr Todd. “Watch out for drivers who seem to be taking unnecessary risks or swerving, especially at night. They may have been drinking, and you need to expect the unexpected from them.”

6. The morning after...

As a further caution, Mr Turner says drivers need to remember that alcohol could still impair their performance the morning after a big night out.

“Forty per cent of drivers have driven while over the limit from the night before, yet many believe they can cancel out the effects with something to eat, a strong coffee or even a good sleep,” he reports.

“While you may feel better, the alcohol will not leave your system any quicker. Keep track of the amount you’ve drunk and avoid driving again until you know you’re completely sober.”

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Don't Let Your Company Holiday Party Become a Liability

JDSupra

By Lindsay Dischley, Melissa Salimbene, Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi PC
November 12, 2019

Some say it’s the most wonderful time of the year. Others are business owners or HR professionals who experience great stress at year-end due to, among other things, the company holiday party. Although the annual holiday party may be viewed as a nice thing to do for employees to both demonstrate appreciation for their efforts over the year and to give employees the chance to unwind and celebrate with colleagues, such parties also expose employers to potential legal liability for allegations of harassment and discrimination, as well as for accidents and injuries. In addition, such well-intended celebrations may cause employee frustration over things such as feeling or even being obligated to attend a work function on off-time, having to incur costs of childcare to do so, and preferring the employer demonstrate employee appreciation through a monetary bonus rather than a party.

Here are several tips for employers to implement in order to host an event that boosts employee morale while minimizing legal liability.

Control Alcohol Consumption

Unsurprisingly, most complaints arising from company parties involve alcohol. After a few drinks, inhibitions are lowered, which may result in employees engaging in conduct or comments that are unacceptable for the workplace. Remember, even if your event occurs offsite, that does not insulate the company from a claim of workplace misconduct. Limiting or even entirely eliminating the alcohol served at a company party may reduce the risk of employees behaving inappropriately. If you

are going to include alcohol at your party, consider the following options to control consumption:

- Hold the party on a weeknight or during the afternoon, as opposed to having a nighttime or weekend event.
- Hold the event offsite for insurance and liability purposes.
- Hire professional bartenders who are trained to identify intoxicated guests and will refuse to serve them. Do not have a self-serve bar where employees help themselves to drinks without supervision.
- Limit the total number of drinks served to each employee by issuing drink tickets or making it a cash bar.
- Limit the type of alcohol served. Consider only serving beer and wine as opposed to spirits. Prohibit shots from being served.
- Just as is done in many sports stadiums, stop serving alcohol for a period of time before the party ends so that employees are not drinking alcohol until the very end of the party.
- Provide plenty of non-alcoholic drink options.
- Designate certain employees to monitor employee alcohol consumption and task them with ensuring no intoxicated employees drive home.
- Provide safe transportation at the company's expense for any potentially intoxicated employees, including shuttles, taxis, Ubers, Lyfts or other designated drivers. The costs of the potential legal liability in permitting an intoxicated employee to drive are far greater than any taxi fare.
- Have food available at all times so employees do not drink on an empty stomach.

Clarify Expectations of Appropriate Workplace Behavior

More poor behavior occurs at company holiday parties than at any other time of year. Thus, in advance of the party, circulate a memorandum to all employees reminding them to act professionally at the upcoming event and provide tips to do so, such as limiting alcohol consumption, dressing

appropriately, specifying that the company is not sponsoring any after-party, and discouraging gift exchanging at the party.

It is crucial to remind employees that, even if the party is offsite and not during working hours, employees are still obligated to comply with the company's anti-harassment policies and will be subject to discipline if they violate these policies or act inappropriately during the event. As a further precaution, recirculate the company's anti-harassment policy to all employees prior to the party and remind supervisors that they have an obligation to report any violations of policy. If the company has not provided employees with anti-harassment training recently, now is a great time to do so.

Take Precautions To Reduce Risk Of Liability

Take steps when planning the party to avoid triggers for bad behavior. For example, do not have Santa Claus visit and invite employees to sit on his lap, and best not to have any mistletoe. Also consider eliminating music or a dancefloor to prevent close contact where inappropriate touching may occur. If the budget permits, invite significant others or families to the event as this may encourage employees to remain on their best behavior.

Keep the theme and décor for the party non-religious. Rather than calling it a "holiday" party, consider making it an "End of Year Party," a "Winter Social," or a "Snowy Soiree." Eliminate any religious symbolism in order to prevent employees who do not celebrate these holidays or share particular religious beliefs from feeling excluded or alleging discrimination. You can still be festive, just stick to winter themes and décor to avoid offending or excluding any employees.

If the party is held after working hours, attendance must be voluntary and all work related business excluded so the employer does not run afoul of wage and hour laws that may require payment to non-exempt employees for their attendance. Make the invitation clear that employees may opt out without penalty or any negative connotation.

Show Appreciation by Giving Employees What They Want

When planning your event, it is worthwhile to get input from your employees to better understand

their preferences. Perhaps it is no party at all, or a low-key holiday luncheon rather than an after-hours event, or maybe everyone loves a nighttime event, but they have suggestions for what should be involved in that celebration. While you will never get a unanimous consensus or be able to satisfy everyone, asking for input from employees will make them feel more included.

Perhaps scrap the holiday party altogether for less risky alternatives such as attending sporting events, bowling, or painting parties. Team building and community service projects are also popular alternatives. Another option is to take the holiday party budget and give it back to employees in the form of a year-end bonus or extra paid time off, particularly if employees have stated this as their preference.

Although it will be impossible for an employer to completely avoid the risks associated with a holiday party, by implementing these tips, employers can minimize those risks and provide their employees with a safe and happy celebration. However, should a problem arise, it is critical that employers take every complaint seriously and promptly conduct a thorough investigation.

TTB bottle size plans would 'harm consumers'

The Spirits Business
by Melita Kiely
November 12, 2019

A consumer group has expressed concern over proposals from the US Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) to eliminate standard bottle sizes for distilled spirits, arguing it would "harm consumers".

The TTB has been seeking public comments for its proposals to eliminate certain standards of fill for wine and distilled spirits.

Currently, the US regulations set specific standards of fill for wine and distilled spirits bottles sold within the US, including 750ml, 500ml, 375ml, 100ml and 50ml.

The TTB's proposals plan to eliminate the guidelines to "provide consumers broader purchasing options". It has presented plans to instead offer a minimum standard of fill for wine, and a minimum and maximum standard of fill for distilled spirits.

However, the National Consumers League (NCL), a private, not-for-profit advocacy group, said the removal of standards of fills for distilled spirits would "damage" consumers' understanding when making purchases.

A letter to the TTB, signed by Sally Greenberg, executive director of the NCL, said: "We believe adoption of the proposal to eliminate most of the standards of fill for distilled spirits has great potential to harm consumers by damaging the common understanding of container sizes, which consumers have come to rely on since the end of Prohibition.

"Eliminating most standards of fill for distilled spirits would also have the effect of making consumers' product comparisons at the point of purchase much more difficult.

"We also object to the proposal because of the danger that unscrupulous suppliers will engage in deceptive conduct by varying container sizes in an effort to increase profits.

"One of TTB's principal missions is to minimise consumer confusion so that they have a sound understanding of the quality and quantity of alcohol beverage products. This proposal does not advent TTB's mission, in our view."

The public consultation closed on 30 October. A final decision from the TTB has not yet been announced.

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