



Serving Alcohol Safely at Workplace Events

Meeting your responsibilities as an employer and keeping your staff safe

Introduction

Social events with employees can be a great way for workmates to get to know one another, as well as to relax, celebrate and build and strengthen relationships.

What goes wrong?

When alcohol is involved and there are no safeguards, people may over-indulge and things can go wrong. This can include inappropriate behaviour, safety issues, drink-driving and a number of other problems.

Problems are more likely when:

- a lot of free or inexpensive alcohol is available
- no food is provided
- people drink quickly because they are in a rush to go

- people drink and then drive home
- getting drunk is considered to be acceptable in the workplace
- drinking takes place during work hours.

In addition to potential problems at events, alcohol-related issues at work can mean absenteeism, reduced productivity and **effectiveness** and workplace-related accidents.

No workplace is exempt. Just over 20% of all full-time salary or wage earners in New Zealand have a hazardous drinking pattern.¹ Some of these people are likely to be in your workplace; on average, 10 staff in an organisation of 50 are so-called hazardous drinkers.

¹ Estimates provided by Ministry of Health for hazardous drinking rates among adults aged 15+ years by labour force status, based on pooled data from the 2011/12 and 2012/13 New Zealand Health Surveys: 20.4% of full-time salary or wage earners compared with 15.2% of the total population have a hazardous drinking pattern.

We also know that:²

- around 392,800 work days per year in New Zealand are lost to alcohol, with thousands of people reporting multiple days off as a result of their alcohol use
- nearly one in ten adults, and a higher proportion of men and younger people, admit to working while feeling under the influence of alcohol at least once in the previous year.

How can I help?

Responsible hosting helps people to enjoy themselves and stay safe.

There are plenty of simple things you can do to be a responsible host and reduce the risks. These steps will also help you meet your legal obligation to ensure the safety of your employees.

Remember, as an employer you need to:

- know your responsibilities
- model expected behaviour yourself.

Remember you are the host – implement the **SAFELY** host responsibility approaches and ensure the event does not get out of hand.

SAFELY means

- ⑤ Use responsible alcohol **Service**
- ① Provide **Alternatives** to alcohol
- ② Offer substantial **Food**
- ③ Prevent **Excess** consumption and intoxication
- ④ Organise **Lifts**
- ⑥ Look after **Young** people

Serving alcohol SAFELY at workplace events

SAFELY provides a simple way to remember the key components of host responsibility.

As a host you set the tone for the workplace event and behaviour related to alcohol. Plan to ensure that people enjoy themselves without over-indulging.

SAFELY

Use responsible alcohol *Service*

- Clearly outline your expectations upfront, eg, drunken behaviour is not acceptable and intoxicated people will not be able to keep drinking. Highlight that drink driving is not the only concern – no accidents or embarrassing behaviour are wanted.
- It is helpful to have drinks served rather than offer a “free for all”. Clarify your expectations about how alcohol is to be managed with anyone serving. Instruct servers not to top up half-full glasses and ensure that people feel comfortable saying no to drinking.
- Another useful approach is to make and adhere to an end time for the event.
- And, remember to obtain a licence to serve alcohol if you need it, and know when you need it.



Do I need a licence?

Factors that affect the need for a licence to serve alcohol at a workplace function include:

- the size of the workplace
- whether the event is open to the public
- whether alcohol is supplied or sold
- your local council’s policy.

Always check with the Liquor Licensing Team at your local council about the need for a licence.

Provide Alternatives to alcohol

- Always provide low and non-alcohol drinks whenever alcohol is served. Provide interesting and appealing non-alcoholic alternatives, beyond juice and water, and provide a range of good quality low alcohol drinks. Make sure these alternatives are available for the duration of the event.
- Plan activities to make sure the event is focused on having an enjoyable time rather than on drinking.

Offer substantial Food

- Have plenty of food available from the start and throughout the event. Provide and promote substantial and interesting food. Do not rely on light snacks and avoid salty nuts and chips that can make people thirsty, possibly encouraging them to drink more.

Prevent Excess consumption and intoxication

- Do not encourage or promote heavy or excessive drinking. Offer quality alternative drinks and activities and take reasonable steps to ensure the supply of alcohol is limited.
- Make sure staff know that intoxicated people will not be served alcohol. Brief waiters and servers that alcohol must not be served to anyone who is intoxicated. Know the signs of intoxication yourself.



Limit the tab

Limiting the tab is an easy option that can make a huge difference without anyone really noticing – set a time when the company stops paying the drinks bill, drinking will slow down and there will be less drunkenness.



Signs of intoxication

- **Coordination:** spills drinks, stumbles, trips, walks into objects, can't stand unaided or sit straight
- **Speech:** slurring, difficulty forming words, loud and repetitive, lose train of thought, nonsensical, unintelligible
- **Behaviour:** seriously inappropriate actions or language, aggressive, rude, belligerent, obnoxious behaviour affecting others
- **Appearance:** glazed/ bloodshot eyes, unable to focus, tired, asleep, dishevelled

Organise Lifts

- Part of being a good host is making sure people can get home safely. So when people need to travel after an event, make sure they don't have to drive if they've been drinking. Pre-arrange transport or help people order taxis.

Look after Young people

- Take extra care with young staff – more than one-third of young drinkers have hazardous drinking patterns (36% compared with 19% of drinkers overall³).
- Add some structure and activities tailored to younger attendees and actively discourage heavy consumption.
- Remember, it is illegal to supply alcohol to anyone aged under 18 years without their parent's express consent. Know the law regarding social supply and the consequences (more details on page 9).

Social supply

Important considerations regarding staff aged under 18 years old.

About 59,000 workers in New Zealand are aged under 18 years old. The Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012 changed the law relating to supply of alcohol to under 18s.

It is illegal to supply alcohol to anyone aged under 18 unless:

- the person supplying the alcohol is the parent or legal guardian and the alcohol is supplied in a **responsible** manner, or
- the person supplying alcohol has the **express consent** of the young person's parent or legal guardian and the alcohol is supplied in a responsible manner.

"Express consent" may include a personal conversation, a hand written note or a text message which you believe to be genuine.

You could be fined up to \$2,000 if you don't follow the law.

"Responsible" supply to under 18s means you should:

- supervise the consumption of alcohol
- provide food
- provide a choice of low alcohol and/or non-alcoholic drinks
- ensure safe transport options are in place.

AND that you also consider:

- the nature of the occasion
- the time period when the alcohol is supplied
- the strength and amount of alcohol supplied
- the age of the minor.

Next steps

What other steps can I take?

Develop an alcohol programme tailored to your workplace. This is a positive way to set expectations in your organisation, improve safety around alcohol and provide pathways to help for those who are drinking problematically.

Involve the workforce from the start and throughout programme development and implementation.

An effective alcohol programme will incorporate a comprehensive suite of education, counselling support and rehabilitation to assist those who may be misusing alcohol. Programmes for employees who are at risk or need treatment can contribute to a safer, healthier, and more productive workplace and will assist employers to meet their responsibility to provide a safe workplace, as required by the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

Critically, a workplace alcohol programme addressing prevention and management of issues with alcohol as well as host responsibility provisions will help to create a culture where employees are willing to acknowledge that they or a colleague have a problem and seek help.

For more information on developing a workplace alcohol programme go to **wellplace.nz**.



For alcohol resources, visit **resources.alcohol.org.nz**

For alcohol information and advice, phone the Alcohol Drug Helpline **0800 787 797**

Te Whatu Ora/ Health New Zealand

Call: 04 917 0060

Email: enquiries@hpa.org.nz

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To order resources visit resources.alcohol.org.nz