

Press Release

HOLIDAY PARTYING CAN TURN TRAGIC FOR RESTAURANT AND CLUB OWNERS

How Proper Training and Guidelines Can Save Lives and Prevent Multi-Million Dollar Liability Lawsuits

NOVATO, Calif., (Dec. 2, 2008) – Holiday partying can quickly take a deadly turn when an intoxicated customer leaves a restaurant or club and causes a serious car crash, which harms themselves or others. Frequently caught up in subsequent legal wrangling is the restaurant or club that served the drinks. Liquor liability lawsuits can prove so costly and onerous they can affect a business' reputation and can ultimately put it out of business.

What can establishments that serve liquor do to properly manage this type of risk?

Fireman's Fund Insurance Company has offered liquor liability insurance to hotels, restaurants and clubs for many years, and counsels its customers on critical steps helpful in guarding against these types of occurrences.

"We recommend proper hiring and continual training of employees who sell and serve alcohol," said Brian Gerritsen, product director for the Commercial business of Fireman's Fund. "But we also suggest going beyond bartenders, wait staff and hosts/hostesses to include management, valet attendants, security personnel and other service staff. With the right training, businesses can greatly increase the safety of their patrons and the general public."

The first step is to hire responsible and competent staff. While many states allow individuals under 21 years of age to serve alcohol, younger individuals may not have the ability to properly observe or understand the effects of alcohol. Gerritsen counsels customers to hire bartenders who have completed a nationally recognized alcohol server certification program, such as TIPS or ServSafe. The same standards should apply to temporary help hired for holiday parties.

The business should also have a formal, written policy on alcohol service that is shared with all staff. This ensures that all employees follow the same standard sets of rules and procedures for the sale and service of alcohol. Proper observation and recognition of intoxicated patrons and underage individuals is a first line of defense against third party liquor liability claims

- MORE -

Fireman's Fund also recommends:

- Monitor and limit – reduce alcohol-related injuries by monitoring and limiting the amount of alcohol sold to patrons. Employees should know the beginning signs of intoxication such as loud speech, irrational statements, and forgetfulness. As intoxication increases, other signs are loss of coordination, increased forgetfulness, and slurred speech.

Guidelines on actual service items can include prohibiting “free pours,” minimizing alcohol “promotions” such as two-for-one specials and discouraging service of shots or complimentary drinks. Other guidance includes encouraging food consumption by offering reduced prices and making snacks available to patrons, offering food in lieu of alcohol, or denying service altogether to those who are intoxicated.

- Phone numbers for driving services – make it easy for bartenders, alcohol servers or valet attendants to quickly and easily contact alternative means for transportation for intoxicated patrons by posting taxi and public transportation numbers.
- Handling intoxication – valet attendants may be the last line of defense against an intoxicated person driving away from a business and causing an accident. It is important that management and alcohol service staff communicate with valet attendants so that automobile keys aren't turned over to a patron suspected of being intoxicated. Valet attendants should be trained to observe such patrons and respond appropriately to such situations.

According to Gerritsen, some large recent verdicts in the United States have involved liquor liability lawsuits. This is why a formal training program and management-enforced safety procedures can reduce alcohol related accidents and injuries. “Keeping patrons happy and safe during the holidays is as important as the bottom line,” he added.

About Fireman's Fund

Fireman's Fund Insurance Company is a premier property and casualty insurance company providing personal, commercial and specialty insurance products nationwide. It is rated “AA-” by Standard & Poor's rating agency. Fireman's Fund is a member of the Allianz Group® (NYSE: AZ), one of the world's largest providers of insurance and other financial services. For more information, visit www.firemansfund.com.

#

Media Contact: Janet Ruiz, Media Relations, (415) 899-5381, janet.ruiz@ffic.com