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As the holidays are quickly approaching, reviewing your insurance coverage is probably not at the top of your to-do list. However, now is the perfect time, for example, to review your homeowners policy, especially if you plan to have guests in your home.

You should consider several factors when planning to have a party at home. Be aware of who you are inviting and who your friends are inviting. By requiring guests to RSVP, you can manage the attendance as well as limit the number of surprise or unwelcome visitors. Having a guest list can also serve as a reference for you if problems arise later and you need to account for who was present.

You also want to be sure your insurance policy is up to date. Call your broker or agent to review your policy to ensure you have the necessary coverages. Do you need an umbrella liability policy to protect you from lawsuits? Are all of your valuable items scheduled on a personal property endorsement or floater? Most insurance policies have limitations on what is covered in the case of theft. You may want to consider whether your floater includes a “mysterious disappearance” provision that covers the disappearance of certain scheduled items, such as silverware or jewelry, when the cause of loss is unknown. This type of policy is useful to have, especially if you are hosting a large party. The bigger the party, the greater the risk that items will be misplaced, damaged, or even stolen.

While guests’ behavior is difficult to control, there are several safety precautions that you *can* control. Be sure to salt icy driveways to avoid slip-and-fall accidents. Keep pets out of the way of guests. You may think Fido is the friendliest dog in the world and wouldn’t hurt a fly, but put him around a house full of strangers (or people he doesn’t see regularly), and you don’t know how he will react to all the excitement. It’s better to take precautions than deal with a lawsuit. You should also control access to potentially hazardous parts of your home, such as the swimming pool or fire pits. Block off areas where you do not want guests to roam.

If you are serving alcohol at your party, there are even more serious factors to consider. If you are hiring a vendor, be sure it has appropriate insurance coverage and a license to serve alcohol. Work with the vendor to monitor alcohol consumption. For example, you may decide to stop serving alcohol at a certain time. You can also limit the type of alcohol provided. As the host, you are ultimately responsible for the alcohol served in your home. Depending on the jurisdiction, you can be held liable for the damages sustained by an adult as a result of the alcohol you legally serve to him or her if, for example, an adult guest leaves your home and proceeds to have a car accident attributable to the alcohol consumption. Additionally, the consequences related to intentional distribution of alcohol to minors (an illegal act) are not covered under a homeowners policy. Some municipalities issue fines based on the number of minors served. Such costs are not covered by a homeowners policy and can become expensive: consider a \$2,000 per person fine multiplied by the number of underage “guests”! It is best to keep minors out of the way if alcohol is present.

These are just some guidelines to assist you in planning a safe party. Most important, have fun! Remember the reason you are getting together in the first place, and with these happy holiday tips, you can make the holidays memorable—for the *right* reasons!

Happy holidays!

## Holiday Risk Management Cook



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