

Liquor Liability at a Golf Course: The Importance of a Liquor Service Policy.

With a new season almost upon us it is imperative to review your Liquor Service Policy as an organization.

The key to protecting yourself and all parties involved is to ensure that your servers, bartenders, managers, the Board of Directors, and the golf club ownership know your Liquor Service Policy and that they are aware of the correct protocol at all times.

The courts have imposed a very high "Duty of Care" upon commercial hosts and require them to ensure that impaired patrons get home safely. Section 39 of the Ontario Liquor License Act, (other provinces are similar) specifically states that if a licensee serves a patron to the point of intoxication and that patron is subsequently injured or injures someone else, the host is liable to the injured party(ies).

Proactive Training is the Key

So, how can you protect your golf club?

For starters you and your staff must be familiar with the Liquor License Act in your province. Review the Act regularly and be sure that your staff understands the wording and the meaning behind the regulation. An Alcohol Server training program is a must for all golf clubs that serve alcohol and it is important to also train the pro shop and golf course marshall staff so that your entire team is knowledgeable and prepared. For your reference we have included links to the major provincial programs at the end of this article.

You must always promote responsible drinking and let your patrons know that you "do not" serve people to intoxication, period. There can be no exceptions and when a difficult situation arises (and they will) your staff must know that they can count on the management and owners to back them up. Without complete support from the entire team, your servers may be afraid to do the right thing. You must educate all of your service staff and management so that they know how to properly intervene with firmness, concern and respect.

In the eyes of the Law the Club's only defense is proactive care and control at all times. If you can prove that your staff did (and always does) everything above and beyond what a "reasonable" commercial host should have done then this will go a long way in your defense. The courts have decided that the duty of care is in the hands of the golf course and therefore the only way to respond is by actively managing your risk.

Be Proactive

Here are some proactive steps that you can take at your golf club:

1. Make sure that your club displays your Liquor Service Policy in an obvious location where your members and guests will see it.
2. Regularly review the Liquor Policy at the ownership/board level to be sure that it is up to date.
3. Server Training programs must be mandatory for ALL staff.
4. Do not allow members or guests to drink to the point of intoxication.
5. Train your servers so that they know how to handle difficult situations.
6. Have taxi cabs available and onsite anytime there is a formal event with alcohol being served.

Conclusion

In closing, make sure that your club has a written Liquor Service Policy and take the time to review it regularly with all stakeholders (this includes wait staff, bartenders, beverage cart, management, ownership and the Board of Directors). This policy must be reviewed and approved by the ownership/Board of Directors who will make changes where needed and sign off on the policy.

Promoting responsible drinking is good business.

For More Information

To locate an authorized Signature Golf Insurance Specialist in your area or for more information please contact us at:

www.signaturerisk.com

Useful Links

Serving It Right (BC)	www.servingitright.com
Service in Action (QC)	www.educalcoo1.qc.ca
Smart Serve (ON)	www.smartserve.ca
ProServe (AB)	www.proserve.aglc.ca
Serving It Safe (MB)	www.mlcc.mb.ca
Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario	www.agco.on.ca

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