

RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

Alcohol Serving

It is estimated 178,000 deaths in the US as a result of alcohol. In 2022, 13,524 deaths involved alcohol impaired driving fatalities. It is important for alcohol servers to receive proper training so that they can help prevent the intoxication of patrons and alcohol induced accidents. What follows are general best practices that should be followed when serving alcohol.

Intoxication Warning Signs

Although the effects of alcohol will be different for each patron, general indications of intoxication include:

- Staggering or stumbling
- Inability to focus
- Slurring of speech
- Bloodshot eyes
- Frequent drinking
- Boisterous/loud behavior

Traffic Light Method

Training programs such as Server and Management Alcohol Responsibility Training (SMART) recommend using a ‘traffic light’ method to determine whether a patron has had too much alcohol:

Red: The patron is showing one or more of the intoxication warning signs enumerated above. Patron may be acting aggressively and may be intending to get fully drunk. Such patrons should not be served anymore alcohol.

Yellow: Patron is not showing definite signs of intoxication but is drinking rapidly. The patron may be showing slight signs of mild impairment. Serve this patron with caution and monitor his/her behavior closely before each additional serving.

Green: Patron exhibits no warning signs of intoxication and is not drinking frequently. This patron may be served.

General Serving Guidelines

In addition to the traffic light method, here are serving guidelines to keep in mind. These include:

- Carefully monitor how much alcohol each patron has consumed. If necessary, keep a notepad available to ensure that you do not lose track.
- Be aware of the amount of alcohol in every drink that is served. Servers should also be aware of the exact ratios of alcohol content to glass sizes.
- Servers should encourage patrons to purchase food (when applicable), as food can decrease the effects of intoxication, especially food that is high in protein.
- Check the identification of any patron who appears younger than 35 years old.

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Intoxicated Patrons

Alcohol servers reserve the right to refuse alcohol to patrons who appear to be intoxicated. This is not only a right, but an obligation. The following general guidelines should be followed when a patron becomes intoxicated in the area where alcohol is being served:

- If the patron asks for more alcohol, kindly refrain from serving it. Consider suggesting non-alcoholic alternatives.
- Do not belittle or become hostile with patrons or the situation could become worse.
- Offer reasonable responses to the patron if the patron continues to request service (for example, “If I serve you again, I’ll be fired.”).
- Determine whether the patron has friends who are not intoxicated and suggest that they arrange for a taxi to the patron home.
- Do not compromise, even if the patron becomes belligerent.
- If a patron must be removed immediately, refrain from using excessive force. Handle patrons as politely as possible. Ask other employees to assist you in removing the patron and ensure there are witnesses nearby.
- If necessary contact local law enforcement or security to escort the patron from the premises.



Alcohol Induced Incidents

When responding to alcohol induced incidents, it is critical to act swiftly and appropriately. General guidelines for handling such incidents include:

- Create a form for servers to fill out so that they can ensure all of their actions are documented. This would include documenting the specifics of each incident, such as whether service was refused, whether transportation was planned for the intoxicated patron, whether law enforcement was contacted, etc.
- Documentation should be kept on file for at least three years for reference.
- Provide written narratives on any incidents that occur, including details such as the date, time, physical descriptions of the intoxicated patrons, the names of the intoxicated patrons if possible, and the names and contact information of any witnesses.
- Incident narratives should be written no more than 60 minutes after the incident has occurred, so that the details can be properly recalled.

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This Tribal First Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice. For more information on this topic, please contact Alliant Risk Control Consulting at (888) 737-4752 or riskcontrol@tribalfirst.com.