British companies warned of potential England v Wales Euro agro

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Employers are being warned of a major HR hangover that could follow this week's England v Wales fixture at Euro 2016 and are being urged to consider potential staff issues before the match.

Passions are likely to be high for Thursday's game, which is one of just three taking place during normal office hours, and the potential for confrontation between colleagues presents a serious risk for employers.

ARAG Legal Services, a leading provider of legal advice and protection to businesses, has highlighted the key risks that companies need to consider and some precautions that they can take.

"The match should be a fantastic occasion for all fans", says David Haynes, ARAG's Head of Underwriting & Marketing, "but with stakes so high and a rivalry so deep, normal workplace 'banter' could easily spill over into language and behaviour that an employer would have to tackle after the game."

"ACAS has put out some good advice on handling issues from unauthorised absence to internet use during the tournament, but many businesses are planning events around this particular fixture, either on company premises or elsewhere. That could be a great morale boost for staff, but there are some glaring HR risks that need to considered and some sensible precautions that should be taken."

Employers and employees are often unaware that responsibilities on both sides can still apply outside the normal place of work, especially if the company has organised the event. So, managers still need to protect staff from language that might constitute harassment, and a scuffle between colleagues in the local pub could be considered gross misconduct.

ARAG's advice to companies planning work related events includes:

• Avoid serving alcohol on company premises if possible and reiterate that company standards of behaviour and language still apply at events elsewhere.

• Remind all employees of company policies on things like absence, alcohol, acceptable behaviour and internet use, well before the game.

• Treat staff fairly, whatever their team and even if they aren't football fans.

• Disciplinary issues that do arise should be handled fairly and just as they would in any other circumstances.

"Nobody wants to be a killjoy, but football and a free bar can be a volatile combination." adds Karen Archer, Managing Director of Law Express, ARAG's specialist legal advice line provider "Throw in the likely disappointment of one set of fans, and the possibility of verbal abuse, discriminatory language and even physical assault becomes quite real.

“Every business will have it’s own employee mix and operational needs to consider, but the best compromise may be to offer an alcohol-free screening of the match at work and let die-hard fans take the afternoon as holiday and head to the pub under their own steam.”

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Notes to Editors

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