



## Special Occasion Permits – Private Events

Information sheets from the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario

### What is a Special Occasion Permit?

A Special Occasion Permit (SOP) is required *any time* alcohol is offered for sale, served or consumed anywhere other than in a licensed establishment or a private place (for example, a corporate boardroom or a residence). *SOPs are issued for occasional special events only, and not to operate an ongoing business.* There are three types of occasions for which an SOP may be issued: Private Events, Public Events and Industry Promotional Events. The following provides information specific to *Private Event SOPs*.

### Private Event SOPs

As of July 1, 2012, the Private Event category replaces the previous Reception Event category.

Private Event SOPs are typically issued for events such as weddings, birthdays, funerals, bridal showers, etc. Private Events are for invited guests only and the event must not be advertised to the public, including by way of flyers, newspaper, internet or radio. The event cannot be open to the public.

**Under a Private Event SOP, there can be no intention to gain or profit from the sale of alcohol at the event.**

Private Event SOPs can be either a “No Sale” event or a “Sale” event.

A **No Sale SOP** is required when:

- alcohol is served without charge;
- no money is collected directly or indirectly for alcohol from guests either before or during the event; and
- the permit holder absorbs all alcohol costs.

No Sale SOPs do not allow for any transaction of money between the permit holder and guests to contribute to the cost of alcohol.

A **Sale SOP** is required when money is collected for alcohol through, for example:

- alcohol sales (cash bar);
- an admission charge to the event which covers the cost of alcohol; or
- the sale of alcohol tickets sold to people attending the event.

If the intention of the event is to recover the cost of any of the alcohol or if money is collected before the event to cover the cost of alcohol, you may be required to obtain a Sale permit.

The permit holder is required to purchase alcohol under the permit from an authorized government retail store (LCBO, LCBO Agency Store, The Beer Store, or authorized manufacturer’s retail store).

### Outdoor Events

For all outdoor SOP events, the applicant must give written notification of the event to the clerk, police, fire and health departments of the municipality where the event is taking place. If a tent, marquee, pavilion or tiered seating is used, the local building department must also be notified in writing. The notification periods are:

- **At least 30 days before the event** is to take place if **fewer than 5,000 people per day** are expected to attend the event; or
- **At least 60 days before the event** is to take place if **5,000 people or more per day** are expected to attend the event.

If your event is taking place outdoors you must submit a sketch or plan with your application clearly showing the exact dimensions of the proposed permit area and location of any tiered seating.

### Tiered Seating

The sale, service and consumption of alcohol is permitted in tiered seating at SOP events. If alcohol will be sold, served or consumed in tiered seating at your event, you must indicate this on your application. If the event is outdoors you must include a sketch showing the location of the tiered seating within the proposed permit area.

### Multiple Day Events

Previously, a person holding multiple events was required to apply for a separate permit for each event and purchase alcohol for each event under a different permit.

As of July 1, 2012, you may apply for a permit identifying multiple events if:

- each event is one in a series of events;
- the application for the permit is for all of the events (dates);

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- the nature, purpose, location and target audience of each of the events (dates) are the same (e.g. service club monthly meeting); and
- as a result of doing so, the permit holder is not operating an ongoing business, or does not appear to be doing so.

Alcohol may be stored between event days under certain circumstances. Police and Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) Inspectors must have full, authorized access to the location. Please see the SOP Application and Guide for specific criteria and information that must be provided as part of the application process.

### SOP Compliance

The AGCO uses a risk-based approach to issuing SOPs which aids in assessing risks to public safety and the public interest, so additional documentation may be required from an SOP applicant. Based on a risk analysis of the event and the applicant, conditions may be attached to the SOP. Where there is a breach of the *Liquor Licence Act* (LLA) or Regulations at an SOP event, the Registrar of Alcohol and Gaming (the Registrar) may impose sanctions on the permit holder, including a monetary penalty or refusing to issue further permits.

#### Responsibilities of a Private Event SOP Holder include:

- The permit holder, responsible person (as indicated on the permit) or his/her designate must be present at all times.
- Generally, only alcohol purchased under the permit from authorized government retail stores (LCBO, The Beer Store or authorized manufacturer's retail store) is allowed to be sold, served or consumed at the event. Homemade wine and beer (including any made at a fermentation on premise facility) may only be served but not sold at a wedding, anniversary, or other family special occasion. This must be identified on the application form. The wine or beer must be made by a member of the family hosting the event and the permit holder must have acquired it free of charge.
- The permit and alcohol purchase receipt(s) must be available for inspection.
- All areas where alcohol will be served and consumed (indoor or outdoor) must be clearly defined and separated from areas where the permit does not apply by a barrier of at least 36" (0.9 m).
- Alcohol can only be sold and served during the hours that are stated on the permit. The regular hours for the sale and service of alcohol are 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. the following day, except for New Year's Eve (December 31) when sale and service must cease at 3 a.m. on January 1. The Registrar may restrict these hours as a condition of the permit.
- Police officers and AGCO Inspectors must be given unobstructed access to the event at all times and may revoke an SOP while the event is underway if they reasonably believe that the LLA or Regulations are being contravened.
- All signs of sale and service must be cleared within 45 minutes of the end time stated on the permit. This includes the removal of all partially consumed and empty bottles, and glasses that contain(ed) alcohol.
- Alcohol cannot be sold, served or provided to anyone who appears to be under 19 years of age without requesting identification. Proper identification must be checked for any person who appears to be under 19 years of age.
- Intoxication, disorderly conduct and unlawful gambling are not permitted.
- Encouraging immoderate consumption of alcohol is not permitted (for example, drinking contests or games). Non-alcoholic beverages must be available.
- Alcohol sold or served under the permit may not be removed from the permit area. Only the permit holder may remove unused alcohol at the conclusion of the event.
- Unused alcohol must be removed from the premises at the end of the event.
- Guests cannot be required to purchase a minimum number of drinks or drink tickets to enter or remain at the event, and no drink containing more than 85 ml of spirits can be sold or served.
- There must be sufficient food available for those in attendance.
- Games of chance or mixed chance and skill (e.g. raffles, 50/50 draws, roulette, crown & anchor, etc.) are not permitted at Private Events. Such activities are only allowed through a licence issued to eligible organizations with charitable or religious purposes.
- SOP holders can learn to lower their liability risks by taking the Smart Serve® program and hiring servers who have taken the course (or a licensed caterer). For more information on Smart Serve®, call 416.695.8737 or toll free at 1.877.620.6082 or visit their website at [www.smartserve.ca](http://www.smartserve.ca).