

Romance concerns can be touchy for employers

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When men and women get together, be it for cocktails, bowling, or even for work, it's only a matter of time before love is in the air.

But when Cupid visits the workplace, "love" can also wind up on company-issued Blackberry units, laptops and office voicemail. And then, unfortunately, it can wind up in court.

"For some reason sex in the workplace is one of the more salient issues that employers need help with," said labor attorney Andrey Tomkiw, partner, Tomkiw Dalton PLC in Royal Oak. "The statistics I've found say 47 percent of all people surveyed admit to having romance in the workplace."

Employers need to have a handle on where they may be vulnerable to law-

suits resulting from office romance.

"I do not advise that employers prohibit co-worker dating because there is minimal liability on the employer," Tomkiw said. "But I do recommend a strict prohibition of supervisors dating subordinates."

When there is an electronic record of the romance, as was the case in Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's affair with his chief of staff, Christine Beatty, there can be double trouble for the employer.

"It is very prudent for each employer to have a well-drafted policy dispelling any expectation of privacy on any company media," Tomkiw said.

However, when it comes to workplace electronics, good judgment still rules, Tomkiw said.

"The employer has to act in common sense and not expose themselves to liability." ■