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2013 Safety and Workers' Compensation Bulletin: The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS)

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WHAT IS THE GHS?

The GHS is an acronym for *The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals*. The GHS is an international system for standardizing and harmonizing the classification and labeling of chemicals. It is a logical and comprehensive approach to:

- Defining health, physical and environmental hazards of chemicals.
- Creating classification processes that use available data on chemicals for comparison with the defined hazard criteria.
- Communicating hazard information, as well as protective measures, on labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDS).

The elements in the GHS supply a mechanism to meet the basic requirements of any hazard communication system, key elements of which include deciding if the chemical product produced and/or supplied is hazardous and to prepare a label and/or Safety Data Sheet as appropriate. Regulatory authorities in countries adopting the GHS will thus take the agreed criteria and provisions, and implement them through their own regulatory process and procedures. The GHS Document provides countries with the regulatory building blocks to develop or modify existing national programs that address classification of hazards and transmittal of information about those hazards and associated protective measures.

WHY WAS THE GHS DEVELOPED?

The production and use of chemicals is fundamental to all economies. The global chemical business is more than a \$1.7 trillion per year enterprise. In the US, chemicals are more than a \$450 billion business and exports are greater than \$80 billion per year.

While the existing laws and regulations are similar, they are different enough to require multiple labels for the same product both within the US and in international trade and to require multiple safety data sheets for the same product in international trade. Several US regulatory agencies and various countries have different requirements for hazard definitions as well as for information to be included on labels or material safety data sheets.

DOES IMPLEMENTING GHS CHANGE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR CURRENT HAZARD COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMS FOR CONTRACTORS AND OTHER INDUSTRIES?

No. The requirements for communicating the hazards of chemicals used in the workplace to protect workers from those hazards remain the same. Providing training, assuring proper storage, maintenance and controls of hazardous materials, assuring proper handling and disposal remain a part of contractor compliance programs. The changes

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are focused on more consistent safety data sheets for communicating information to employees and clearer labels and warnings that are internationally recognized.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The basic goal of hazard communication is to ensure that employers, employees and the public are provided with adequate, practical, reliable and comprehensible information on the hazards of chemicals, so that they can take effective preventive and protective measure for their health and safety. Thus, implementation of effective hazard communication provides benefits for **governments, companies, workers, & the public.**

It is anticipated that application of the GHS will:

- Enhance the protection of human health and the environment by providing an internationally comprehensible system.
- Provide a recognized framework to develop regulations for those countries without existing systems.
- Facilitate international trade in chemicals whose hazards have been identified on an international basis.
- Reduce the need for testing and evaluation against multiple classification systems.

Benefits to companies include:

- A safer work environment and improved relations with employees.
- An increase in efficiency and reduced costs from compliance with hazard communication regulations.
- Application of expert systems resulting in maximizing expert resources and minimizing labor and costs.
- Facilitation of electronic transmission systems with international scope.
- Expanded use of training programs on health and safety.
- Reduced costs due to fewer accidents and illnesses.
- Improved corporate image and credibility.

Benefits to workers and the public include:

- Improved safety for workers and others through consistent and simplified communications on chemical hazards and practices to follow for safe handling and use.
- Greater awareness of hazards, resulting in safer use of chemicals in the workplace and in the home.

WHEN WILL THE GHS BE IMPLEMENTED?

- GHS has been adopted federally and in California and is applicable now.
- By **December 1, 2013**, all employers are required to provide to their employees training on the new labels elements and safety data sheets format to facilitate recognition and understanding.

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About Robert E. Downey

Bob graduated from the University of San Francisco (B.A. 1968) and received his Masters Degree in Public Administration from Golden Gate University (1977). Bob was discharged from the US Army as a Captain in 1977 and began his career in loss prevention and safety. He brings over 20 years experience in this discipline through employment with the Sacramento Municipal Utility District as a Safety Engineer, Director of Regulatory Services for the Associated General Contractors of California, and the St. Paul Insurance Companies as a Loss Control Consultant. Bob has been associated with Woodruff-Sawyer since 1999 providing training, safety and loss control services to our clients. He is an authorized OSHA instructor, and recognized author of numerous articles in publications for the American Society of Safety Engineers, the American Nuclear Society, the Associated General Contractors of California and the California State Building Trades Council.

Key Excerpts from Federal OSHA Website

www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/ghs.html (a 47 page document entitled: "A Guide to The Globally Harmonized system of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS)" providing detailed information regarding the Globally Harmonized System. It contains numerous documents, fact sheets, quick cards and other references to assist employers.)

For online training on the new Safety Data Sheets as well as information regarding new pictograms used in the GHS system, please visit www.clicksafety.com.

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