

CHECKMATE SAFETY

OSHA Global Harmonization System

by Paul English

In 1983, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA published its' preamble rule for the Hazard Communication Standard or what would become to be known as the HAZCOM or Right-To-Know Standard. This standard required employers to identify and effectively communicate chemical hazards in the workplace. When drafted, the HAZCOM standard required chemical manufacturers and distributors to create and maintain Safety Data Sheets regarding the chemical composition, safe handling, as well as first aid procedures for product exposure.

In January 1990, OSHA requested input regarding international harmonization efforts that were underway by the International Labor Organization (ILO) to better communicate chemical hazards for employee use in the workplace. After years of research and census data review, it was determined that 4 different systems needed to be incorporated into the new standard. These systems included:

- Requirements in the U.S. for the workplace, consumers, and pesticides;
- Requirements of Canada for the workplace, consumers, and pesticides;
- European Union directives for classification and labeling of substances and preparations;
- United Nations Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods.

This system would become to be known as the Global Harmonization System or GHS.

What are the major changes to the HAZCOM standard regarding GHS?

Hazard classification

Under the new GHS system, chemical manufacturers, importers and distributors will be providing specific criteria for classification of health and physical hazards, as well as classification of mixtures.

Labels

Chemical manufacturers, distributors, and importers will be required to provide a label that includes a harmonized signal word, pictogram, and hazard statement for each hazard class and category. Precautionary statements must also be provided.

This will provide the biggest change to industry for labeling and training requirements for employers. Retraining of employees in new label sign words and pictograms is considered a change in the workplace to which all employees must understand. This is the main reason and benefit of GHS: to provide a harmonized global labeling system informing employees of hazards associated with the chemical used in the workplace.



Safety Data Sheets

Material Safety Data Sheets, (MSDS) will now be referred as Safety Data Sheets or SDS. These new SDS will now be required to have a specified 16-section format, thus making all SDS required chemicals equal in sharing and distributing information.

Information and training

The GHS does not address training. However, the proposed Hazard Communication Standard will require that workers are trained within two years of the publication of the final rule to facilitate recognition and understanding of the new labels and safety data sheets. Training in the revised HAZCOM standard will create the need to retrain employees in the new labeling system.

The goal of the new GHS standard is to provide a standard way of communicating chemical hazards on one platform. By creating one standard platform, protection of human life and the environment will increase on a global scale. More information on when GHS will be implemented and if all hazardous chemicals will be covered can be found at <http://www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/ghs.html>

The full Globalization publication can be found at http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_rev00/00files_e.html

Works Cited

Labor, D. O. (2012 OSHA-H022K-2006-0062). Hazard Communication. Washington D.C.: Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

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