

## **Global Harmonization Brings New Changes to Chemical Container Labels**

We work with chemicals every day--from the gasoline that we put in our cars to the materials that we work with on the job. Since 1988, the Workplace Hazard Material System has been the basis for providing information for workers who use chemicals on the job. If you are a safety professional, you have probably trained thousands of people on this topic, and you know that container labels are the first thing that every worker needs to look at to determine the hazards of the product. With our globalized supply chain for chemical products there are changes taking place that will effect what we see on the label.

### *Global Harmonization System*

The next time you reach for a bottle or can containing a chemical product, stop and take a look. You're going notice labels that look a little different. Chemical manufacturers throughout the world are standardizing label information. You may hear this referred to as the **Global Harmonization System (GHS)**. It's a way of communicating the hazards of chemicals by using the same language and symbols regardless of what country your workplace is located in.

The idea of having a standardized worldwide system for hazard communication was first conceived at the 1992 "Rio Earth Summit" and was intended to complement the standards that had been adopted for the uniform transportation of hazardous materials. *The United Nations' Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods* developed uniform criteria for classifying and labeling dangerous goods for purposes of transportation, but did not address environmental, worker or consumer safety regulations. The stated goal of GHS was to develop a "globally harmonized hazard classification and compatible labeling system, including national safety data sheets and easily understandable symbols, should be available, if feasible, by the year 2000." The GHS was agreed to and adopted by the United Nations in early 2003 and revisions to the system were released in 2005 and 2007.

The GHS is not a standard or a rule. It is a voluntary system and as such, does not impose binding treaty obligations on countries. Each country is responsible for enacting the GHS system and countries could adapt them to conform to existing national regulations, however, participants agreed that the level of protection offered to workers, consumers, general public and environment should not be reduced.

### *GHS Labeling*

Labels on chemical products, as they come from the manufacturer look different for every product; The GHS standardized label elements so that they all have the same five basic pieces of information:

- A signal word
- A Hazard Statement
- Precautionary Statements
- A Product Identifier
- and the name of the manufacturer or supplier.










The first thing to look for on a label is a **Signal Word**. This word is used to alert you to the potential hazard and to indicate the relative severity level of the hazard. Danger is for more severe hazards and Warning is for less severe hazards. Sometimes, there is no signal word, but that doesn't mean that the product has no hazards.

Next is the **Hazard Statement**. This is a phrase that describes the nature of the product hazards, including, where appropriate, the degree of hazard. This can be a word, like "flammable" or "toxic" or a phrase like "respiratory sensitizer".

**Precautionary Statements** are listed next. These may include symbols and descriptions of the recommended measures that should be taken to minimize or prevent adverse effects from exposure, improper handling or improper storage. Examples of these statements might include "use gloves when handling" or "keep

out of eyes and off skin”.

You might see **symbols or pictograms** that represent hazards. These might include the following:

<b>Explosives</b>		<b>Toxins</b>	
<b>Flammables</b>		<b>Health Hazards</b>	
<b>Corrosives</b>		<b>Environmental Hazards</b>	
<b>Compressed Gasses</b>		<b>Exclamation Mark</b>	
<b>Oxidizers</b>			

The Exclamation Mark symbol is meant to draw your attention to the written information on the label.

The **Product Identifier** is the name of the product inside the container along with a list of ingredients that contribute to the hazards of the material. You may also find the shipping name, shipping numbers and part numbers.

Finally each label will include the **name and contact information for the manufacturer or supplier**.

## *GHS Implementation*

So, how soon will Global Harmonization Labeling become the law of the land? The goal of the GHS was to have this system adopted by participating countries by January 2008.

USA - Based on the pace of rule generation that has been the norm at OSHA over the past few years, this may take a long time. OSHA published an advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPR) on September 12, 2006 and has requested comments from the public, but no schedule for changes to the Hazard Communication Standard have been released. If your company imports chemical products from Europe, you may be seeing GHS labeling on products now. If you manufacture chemicals in Europe or export chemical products to The European Union, you may already be using the Global Harmonization System for the design of labels and Safety Data Sheets.

CANADA – Will likely follow the time line of its largest trade partner the USA.

For more information on GHS, go to the following website:

### **Canada**

[http://www.ccohs.ca/education/presentations/Global\\_Ham\\_Sys\\_GHS\\_NAOSH07n.pps#301,28,CANADIAN SECTORS](http://www.ccohs.ca/education/presentations/Global_Ham_Sys_GHS_NAOSH07n.pps#301,28,CANADIAN_SECTORS)

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/intactiv/ghs-sgh/implement/index-eng.php>

[http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs\\_welcome\\_e.html](http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_welcome_e.html)

### **USA**

OSHA has published A Guide to The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS) and is available at:

<http://www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/ghs.html>