



Regulatory Compliance

New Rules for GHS Safety Classification Aim to Standardize and Simplify Chemical Labeling

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What You Need To Know

Originally implemented in 2003, the GHS classifications are now mandatory.
The system is in all languages and specifies 16 essential details about a product.
Training sessions are helping workers become more familiar.

From pictograms to clearer labeling, why the new GHS classification is now mandatory.

Hazardous chemicals crisscross the globe, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has a rigorous classification system to improve safety, protecting workers and consumers from the chemicals' potential risks. All manufacturers across the United States should be up to speed and comply with the now-mandatory chemical labeling system.

The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS), first adopted by the United Nations in 2003, is now mandatory in the United States. The chemical labeling system standardizes information about risky materials and makes sure all workers handling such chemicals know exactly what they're handling, how best to handle these products and what to do in an emergency. Hazardous chemicals range from household cleaners to pyrophoric gas, combustible dust and anything that could become an asphyxiant or pose a physical or health hazard.

Standardizing Chemical Labeling with Pictograms

"The new system literally gets everyone on the same page," says Glenn Spetta, senior manager of environmental compliance and sustainability at MSC Industrial Supply Co. in Melville, New York. "Before, you received safety data sheets accompanying a shipment containing hazardous chemicals from overseas, and the sheets might have some information, but not everything you needed to know. Or it would be in a language you couldn't read. Now, shipments come with pictograms, so everyone worldwide has these simple pictures to look at to quickly ascertain what they're dealing with."

Under the new system, in addition to the pictograms, the workers who receive shipments are provided with safety data sheets in their language, detailing everything they need to know about that shipment. Every safety sheet has to have the same 16 points of information, including:

- What is in the shipment
- Details about the chemical, including its color, odor and form
- Potential health risks if the shipment is mishandled, such as whether it's corrosive, carcinogenic or harmful when inhaled
- What first-aid or emergency care is needed if there's a problem

GHS standard labels must also feature the following:

- Product identifier or ingredient disclosure
- Signal word to indicate the severity of risk, either "danger" or "warning"
- Hazard statement
- Pictograms
- Precautionary statement
- Supplier identification

Communicate Better with Clear Visuals

The new Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals relies heavily on clear visuals to communicate hazardous shipments' contents and risks. Called pictograms, these visuals accompany safety data sheets and give workers a quick glance of what to expect. Some examples:

- An exclamation point indicates acute toxicity and risks to workers' respiratory systems.
- An image of a flame indicates flammable material, pyrophoric substances and organic peroxides.
- An image of a flame over a circle indicates oxidizers.
- An image of a bomb indicates explosive materials.
- An image of a skull with crossbones indicates extreme toxicity; the materials may be fatal.

Chemical Labeling Compliance Through Partnership

Compliance among businesses is ongoing; manufacturers have been holding training sessions relaying the new OSHA requirements and practices.

As of June 1, 2015, businesses needed to correctly label all chemical shipments and use the new safety data sheets. As of June 1, 2016, businesses needed to show that employees knew how to use the new pictograms. In addition, MSC Direct has hosted training sessions to boost compliance with the new system and ensure that workers know how to:

- Read the chemical labels of products they handle.
- Review safety data sheets and follow their instructions for safe use.
- Properly wear and use personal protective equipment.
- Wash their hands and face after working with or handling chemicals.
- Avoid eating, drinking or smoking near any hazardous chemicals.
- Label any chemical containers they create.

Other steps include reporting spills to supervisors immediately and disposing of damaged or expired chemicals properly. "It's been a process," Spetta says. "Some companies have been struggling with this, and we're trying to get everyone up to speed."

Is your company up to date with its GHS classification?

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