



# Haz Com & GHS

## WHAT GHS IS AND HOW IT WILL AFFECT EMPLOYERS

GHS is an acronym that stands for "Global Harmonization System." It is a relatively new system for classifying, labeling and providing information about potentially hazardous chemicals that is being implemented in various forms all around the world.

Prior to the GHS, many countries (including the United States) had their own chemical identification system, and in many instances they conflicted with each other. For example, a given chemical may have been classified as a physical or health hazard in one country but was considered to be safe in another. So the GHS was developed to help harmonize those systems. Individual countries are not forced to participate in the GHS; however, if they do not, they may find it difficult to market their chemical products to the nations that do. So at the present time, most industrial nations have either adopted or are in the process of adopting all or portions of GHS into their chemical systems.

In the United States, OSHA has had a chemical safety standard in place since 1970. It is known as the "Hazard Communications Standard" or "Haz Com." This standard requires affected employers (who have employees exposed to potentially hazardous chemicals) to:

- **Maintain an inventory list** of all such potentially hazardous chemicals
- **Maintain informative "data sheets"** for each potentially hazardous chemical
- **Ensure proper labeling & containerization** for each chemical on site
- **Train all affected employees** in their chemical exposures and related controls
- **Maintain a Hazard Communications Plan** in written form, and keep it up to date

The OSHA Hazard Communication Standard went virtually unchanged since its inception, but in 2012, it adopted provisions of the Global Harmonization System which has since affected chemical manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors and employers. From the perspective of U.S. employers and their employees, the major changes are as follows:

- **Labels on in-coming containers of workplace chemicals must comply with the GHS**  
They must include: *Pictograms, Signal Words, Product Identifier, Hazard Statements, Precautionary Statements, and Manufacturer Contact Info.* (*Supplementary Info optional*)
- **Safety Data Sheets (SDS) have replaced Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)**  
Each SDS must address 16 categories (in a specific order), related to a chemical's classification, properties, usage, storage, etc. The former MSDS often had only 8 categories which did not need to be in order.

- **Affected employees must be trained in relation to GHS**

By *Dec 1, 2013* (now passed), all employees with a chemical workplace exposure needed to be trained in the new GHS Labels and SDS Sheets. Going forward, all such employees must be trained in the same as part of their required Haz Com Training.

- **Hazard Communication Plans must reflect the GHS**

By *June 1, 2016* (now passed) employers required to have a Hazard Communication Plan needed to update that plan to incorporate all applicable elements of the GHS.

Please note that affected employers who are not presently compliant with Haz Com 2012 (including its GHS provisions) may be subjected to OSHA penalties and costly citations.

For a more detailed review of Haz Com and the GHS, refer to [www.OSHA.gov](http://www.OSHA.gov).

If your company would like assistance with Haz Com 2012 / GHS compliance and training, please contact *Safety by REQUEST* at [www.SafetyByRequest.com](http://www.SafetyByRequest.com).

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