

news & notes

OSHA GHS FINAL RULE

OSHA has announced that the final rule for GHS, or Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals, will become law effective May 25, 2012. The effective date of the final rule is 60 days after March 26, the date of the rule's publication in the *Federal Register*.

The new GHS rule will be added to OSHA's existing Hazard Communication Standard (HazCom), or worker right-to-know law. OSHA says the GHS rule will help prevent 43 worker fatalities and 585 occupational injuries and illnesses from chemical exposures every year.

According to OSHA, the GHS rule will affect over 5 million workplaces and 40 million workers. There are two primary groups of employers that will be affected by the rule:

- 90,000 employers that are chemical manufacturers, importers, and distributors
- 5 million other employers where their employees use, handle, or store chemicals

OSHA will allow employers 4 years to transition into compliance with the new GHS requirements, but employers must be trained about the new labels and safety data sheets (SDSs) by December 1, 2013. During the phase-in period, employers would be required to be in compliance with either the existing HazCom standard or the revised standard with GHS, or both.

OSHA recognizes that hazard communication programs will go through a period of time where labels and SDSs under both standards will be present in the workplace. This will be considered acceptable, and employers are not required to maintain two sets of labels and SDSs for compliance purposes.



Harmonizing hazardous substances.

EMPLOYEE SAFETY NEWSLETTER

May 2012

Global Harmonization Basics

What you need to know

Changes to OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (HazCom) as part of the alignment with the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS), primarily affect the areas of safety data sheet (SDS) formatting, chemical classification, labeling elements, and worker training. In a recent BLR® webinar, Erin McVeigh and Louise Bernstein outlined the basics.

“The GHS was developed by a United Nations (UN) committee of experts, and was adopted back in 2003,” Bernstein explained. It came about because country-by-country hazard classification and communication laws are similar in purpose, but different enough to result in inconsistent hazard classifications for similar products, and dissimilar-looking labels and SDSs. This is a key challenge for international trade. Bernstein continued: “As the global marketplace continues to grow, supply chains now often cross international borders, so there is an increasing need for standardization, which was the real key motivation behind GHS.”

Written by the UN, the goal of the GHS is to harmonize differing workplace hazard classification and labeling systems across the world by harmonizing how hazardous substances and mixtures are classified. This will change how hazard information is communicated, including new pictograms and phrases. It will streamline the format of SDS and labels.

“Along with global harmonization for trade purposes, the GHS has another purpose, which is to improve hazard awareness for anyone who may come into contact with a chemical throughout its lifecycle. This could include workers, consumers, transporters, and emergency responders—especially in countries that have little or no hazard communication laws in place at the moment,” Bernstein advised.

The GHS itself is not a regulation or a standard. Instead, it has become the harmonized, internationally recognized method to classify hazards and communicate those hazards through the supply chain. Regulatory authorities take the UN standard and implement it through their own regulatory processes. For this reason, there can still be variations between countries.

The process for OSHA to implement GHS has been long and involved because GHS represents the most significant change to HazCom since its implementation in the early 80s. Implementing GHS means changes to HazCom and to the 26

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WHISTLEBLOWER CHANGES

OSHA is undertaking a restructuring of the Whistleblower Protection Program. The office now reports directly to Assistant Secretary Dr. David Michaels, who heads OSHA. The initiative used to be under the Directorate of Enforcement Programs.

The restructuring was first announced last August as part of the agency's plan for bolstering enforcement of 21 whistleblower laws under its jurisdiction. In addition to the change at the national office, OSHA has launched pilot projects to evaluate changes in 10 field regions that could further enhance whistleblower protection.

Michaels says the changes "demonstrate [OSHA's] ... commitment to strengthening a program that is critically important to the protection of worker rights."

NEEDLESTICK NEWS

While other factors may have contributed, University of Virginia researcher Elayne Komblatt Phillips called the effect of OSHA's Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act "very significant." She and colleagues examined 10 years of injuries.

Needlesticks were rising before 2001 when the law took effect. The number dropped by about 38 percent that year and stayed well below previous levels through 2005.

The law mandated changes to OSHA's bloodborne pathogens standards. It required employers to provide safer devices, maintain records of injuries, and involve employees in device selection. The study appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.



Exercise Excuses

May is National Physical Fitness & Sports Month

Here are five exercise excuses along with possible solutions from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN), an information service of the National Institutes of Health:

1. **I don't have time.**
 - * Give exercise the same priority you give brushing your teeth.
 - * Schedule active chores every day.
 - * Make family time active with walks, ball games, and bike rides.
2. **I'm too tired at the end of the day.**
 - * Incorporate exercise into your day by taking the stairs.
 - * Find another time to exercise.
3. **It's boring.**
 - * Find activities you like.
 - * Make it social. Plan activities with friends.
4. **It's expensive.**
 - * Choose free exercise, such as gardening or walking.
 - * Look for discounts, such as gym membership specials.
5. **No one I know exercises.**
 - * Lead by example.

Consult with your health professional before beginning an exercise program.

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Confined Spaces Responsibilities

Work safely together in tight spaces

Check out the following brief descriptions of the responsibilities of two key players in confined space operations.

Authorized Entrants work safely in a confined space by:

- Following safety procedures
- Ensuring the atmosphere is tested, monitored, and well-ventilated
- Maintaining contact with co-workers and attendants
- Using personal protective equipment, including harnesses and retrieval lines
- Alerting the attendant immediately to hazardous conditions or exposure symptoms
- Evacuating immediately if danger develops or the attendant signals

Attendants monitor and help ensure entrants' safety by:

- Remaining outside the space and knowing who's in it
- Warning unauthorized people to stay away
- Staying in constant contact with authorized entrants
- Ordering entrants to leave the space if they lose contact, show signs of exposure, or face danger from changing conditions
- Alerting rescue services and performing permitted nonentry rescues