

## The New GHS Labelling System - No need to be Alarmed

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The January 1, 2012 adoption of the WHS Regulations in some states of Australia has introduced a new system of hazard classification and hazard communication for workplace chemicals. The new system known as the Globally Harmonised System (GHS) is an internationally agreed system designed to harmonise the diverse range of classification and hazard communication systems currently being used throughout the world.

While in Australia there is increased alarm regarding the implementation of this new system, the impact on most workplaces will be minimal.

### Hazardous Chemicals vs Hazardous Substances

Prior to the introduction of the WHS Regulations, chemicals were regulated under Hazardous Substances Regulations AND Dangerous Goods Regulations. There was a lot of overlap with the key differences being:

- Hazardous Substances included chemicals which could be hazardous when machined or burnt such as “wood dust” and “vehicle exhaust emissions”. These products were not classified as Dangerous Goods but could still pose a risk to health in the workplace.
- Similarly, some packaged materials which weren't toxic, such as compressed air in cylinders, were considered to be a safety hazard when transported and were therefore classified as a Dangerous Good but not Hazardous Substance.

Most hazardous substances are also classified as dangerous goods and vice versa. Under the WHS regulations, the term Hazardous Chemical has been introduced which essentially combines the terms Dangerous Good and Hazardous Substance.



### Transitional Period

Most people involved in the handling of hazardous chemicals will be familiar with the classification of chemicals in accordance with the Australian Dangerous Goods Code (ADG).

There will be a five year **transitional period** for moving to the new GHS-based system. During this time, both the Hazardous Substances and Dangerous Goods classification systems and the GHS are recognised under the WHS Regulations. By 31 December 2016 all workplace hazardous chemicals must be classified according to the GHS and labels & MSDS must be updated.

Victoria has not introduced the WHS Regulations but has amended the definition of Hazardous Substances to include substances that meet the criteria for hazard classification set out in the GHS. Other states not yet working under the WHS Regulations have similar provisions.



## What Changes Will be Noticed?

In the next few years not much will be noticed. People may start to see some different pictograms (diamond shaped symbols) on labels and MSDS's.

Under the GHS, MSDS's will be known as Safety Data Sheets (SDSs).

Newer MSDS will refer to a classification under the GHS instead of by the criteria of NOHSC/Safe Work Australia. Newer MSDS's will have GHS-based risk and safety (hazard and precautionary) phrases. In general, substances that are hazardous under the NOHSC criteria will be hazardous according to the GHS.

The basic duties in relation to hazardous chemicals, including identifying hazards through obtaining safety data sheets and correct labelling, assessing risks, training staff, and implementing appropriate controls has not been affected.

## What do You Really Need To Do?

Employers need not be alarmed about the changes. During worker training, the new pictograms, label format and hazard statements should be discussed so that people working with chemicals become familiar with the new system.

Chemical Registers do not need to be reproduced. In fact, changing the classification in the registers without adequate training of employees could result in confusion and should be avoided. The 5 year transitional period is provided to allow for familiarising people with the new system in advance of changes to the Registers.

Over a period of 5 years, chemical importers and manufacturers will be required to reclassify their chemicals in accordance with GHS criteria, and update the safety data sheets

and labels for those which are hazardous.

In states where the WHS Regulations have been introduced, organisations should use the GHS classifications for calculating Placard and Manifest Quantities.

Over the next 5 years (until December 2016 both systems can be used). Post this date only the GHS system is to be used.

