OSHA’s Revised Hazard Communication Standard 2012

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) announced on March 20, 2012 the promulgation of the new Hazard Communication Standard, 29CFR 1910.1200. The final rule was published on March 26, 2012 and includes significant changes around the adoption of elements of the Globally Harmonized System of the Classification and Labeling of Hazardous Chemicals also known as GHS.

According to OSHA, the new standard will cover over 43 million workers who produce or handle hazardous chemicals in more than five million workplaces across the country and is expected to prevent over 500 workplace injuries and illnesses and 43 fatalities annually.

The GHS is a system for harmonizing hazard classification criteria and chemical hazard communication elements worldwide. The GHS is not a regulation; rather it is a framework or guidance for classifying and labeling hazardous chemicals.

That being said, the Hazard Communication Standard is a regulation and compliance with the regulation is required under OSHA. The key changes to the standard with the adoption of GHS revolve around the following elements:

- **Hazard classification**: Provides specific criteria for classification of health and physical hazards, as well as classification of mixtures.

- **Labels**: Chemical manufacturers and importers will be required to provide a label that includes a harmonized signal word, pictogram, and hazard statement for each hazard class and category. Precautionary statements must also be provided.

- **Safety Data Sheets**: Will now have a specified 16-section format.

- **Information and training**: Employers are required to train workers on the new label elements and safety data sheets format to facilitate recognition and understanding.

The scope of the current standard requires chemical manufacturers or importers to assess the hazards of chemicals which they produce or import. Under the revised standard, the chemical manufacturer or importer shall determine the hazard classes, and, where appropriate, the category of each class that apply to the chemical being classified. The two hazard classes under the GHS which have been adopted into the hazard communication standard are physical hazards and health hazards. They are identified as the following:

- **Physical Hazards**:
  - Explosives
  - Flammable Gases
  - Flammable Aerosols
  - Oxidizing Gases
  - Gases Under Pressure
  - Flammable Liquids
  - Flammable Solids
  - Self-Reactive Substances
  - Pyrophoric Liquids
  - Pyrophoric Solids
  - Self-Heating Substances
  - Substances Which in Contact with Water Emit Flammable Gases
  - Oxidizing Liquids
  - Oxidizing Solids
  - Organic Peroxides
  - Substances Corrosive to Metal

- **Health Hazards**:
  - Acute Toxicity
  - Skin Corrosion
  - Skin Irritation
  - Eye Effects
  - Sensitization
Labeling of chemical containers is another significant change under the new standard. Historically, there has been no standardized label for containers of hazardous chemicals. Therefore an employer can purchase the same chemical from two different manufacturers and the labels will not look the same, save for the three constants: identity of chemical, applicable hazard warnings, and manufacturer information.

The new standard for labeling will also include requirements for hazard statements which are basic and standardized phrases assigned to a hazard class and category that describe the nature of the hazard. An example of this might be “Harmful or Fatal if Swallowed”. In addition, precautionary statements are required to identify measures to minimize or prevent adverse effects such as “Keep Container Tightly Closed”.

Same as in the past, the label will be required to include a product identifier, the name or number used for the hazardous product and supplier identification, including name, address and telephone number.

Probably the most significant change that industry has anticipated is the shift from the traditionally required Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) to the GHS compliant Safety Data Sheet (SDS). Many MSDS end users have been frustrated by the lack of a designated format for information presented and new SDS requirement will effectively resolve that frustration.

The new SDS will be organized into 16 mandatory information sections and include the following:

- Section 1. Identification
- Section 2. Hazard(s) Identification
- Section 3. Composition/information on ingredients
- Section 4. First-Aid measures
- Section 5. Fire-fighting measures
- Section 6. Accidental release measures
- Section 7. Handling and storage
Appendix D to 1910.1200--Safety Data Sheets, will provide chemical manufacturers with more detail on the specific content of each section of the safety data sheet.

Information and training is a key part of the Hazard Communication standard, past and present. Employers will be required to update their training programs to address the changes to the standard. The training program should at a minimum address and understanding of the 10 health and 16 physical hazard classes and subsequent categories; labeling requirements with pictograms, signal words, precautionary statements, etc. and SDS format and content.

Finally, existing written Hazard Communication Programs will require revision to reflect changes in the regulation as well.

The million dollar questions of course are: what do I need to do, and how soon do I need to do it? The answers to these questions depend on if you are a chemical manufacturer or an employer as the timelines vary.

If you are addressing compliance with the new standard as a chemical manufacturer or importer, then you must review hazard information for all chemicals produced or imported, classify those chemicals according to the new classification criteria, and update labels and safety data sheets. OSHA requires compliance with all modified provisions of this final rule by June 1, 2015 except distributors may ship products labeled by manufacturers under the old system until December 1, 2015.

If you are addressing compliance with the new standard as an employer, then you must train employees on the new label elements and SDS format by December 1, 2013 and comply with all modified provisions of this final rule by June 1, 2015. You must also update alternative workplace labeling and hazard communication program as necessary, and provide additional employee training for newly identified physical or health hazards by June 1, 2016.

For additional information or questions regarding the revised Hazard Communication Standard or implementation of the new requirements for your workplace, please don’t hesitate to utilize our "Ask the Expert" Feature.

Other useful resources include: