

# HSE Small Business Trade Association Forum

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Paper SBTAF/07/01

## **AGENDA ITEM 3: An introduction to GHS (Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals)**

### **The UN Globally Harmonised System (GHS) for the Classification and Labelling of Chemicals ([www.hse.gov.uk/ghs](http://www.hse.gov.uk/ghs))**

#### **Current EU system of classification, labelling of hazardous chemicals**

1. The EU classification and labelling system provides the information required to use chemicals without causing harm to the user, others and the environment. The Directives are implemented in Great Britain through the Chemicals Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply Regulations (CHIP).

2. The system identifies hazardous properties of chemicals, including:

- physical hazards such as flammability and the potential to explode;
- health hazards such as toxicity, corrosivity, irritation, sensitisation, carcinogenicity, mutagenicity and reproductive toxicity; and/or
- environmental hazards such as aquatic toxicity and the potential to affect the ozone layer.

3. Where hazardous chemicals are supplied, the system requires the packages containing the chemicals to be *labelled*, alerting recipients/users to the dangers. The labels carry warning symbols e.g. the black 'skull and cross-bones' set against an orange background, together with standardised warning phases such as "may cause cancer." In addition, *Safety Data Sheets*, provide further supplemental information for workers (including information on first aid, fire fighting and measures to prevent and control environmental exposure, etc).

#### **United Nations Globally Harmonised System (GHS) agreement**

4. Trade in chemicals is global, suppliers have to meet different requirements around the world, and the levels of protection enjoyed by both people and the environment in the EU are not the same the world over. The GHS is the UN's proposed system to establish a single harmonised classification and labelling system for the global supply of chemicals.

5. It is expected that GHS will increasingly become accepted as the world standard. Once fully implemented the GHS will:

- Help industry by:

- reducing the costs in complying with several systems;
- facilitating international trade in chemicals by reducing technical barriers;
- reducing the need for testing and evaluation of chemicals.

- Help users by:

- providing a more harmonised, consistent system for classification and hazard communication that will result in better health, safety and environmental protection;
- providing a recognised framework for those countries without an existing system.

- Help regulators (industry and users) by:

- improving the hazard information flow up and down the supply chain.

5. For the EU, its existing system already achieves all of the above. It is unlikely the EU will experience significant net benefits for human health or environmental protection. But for countries that have no system, GHS will be a significant step forward in the safer management of chemicals. GHS has a strong political support across the world.

### **Draft EC Regulation based on the GHS**

7. The European Commission has proposed a draft Regulation to implement the GHS in the EU. This regulation will replace national legislation such as CHIP. This will be achieved over the transitional period of 7.5 years. The EU intends to implement the vast majority of the UN GHS.

8. In August 2006, the European Commission began a two-month consultation on the draft GHS Regulation. The proposed Regulation was generally well received by both Member States' authorities and industry.

### **What does GHS mean for UK business?**

9. All chemical suppliers, both large and small, need to be aware of GHS and the changes that it will bring. GHS will bring changes to how hazardous chemicals are classified and how those hazardous properties are communicated to users. However, as GHS is very similar in concept and intention to the existing EU system, for the UK, the new Regulation will mean practical changes rather than the introduction of an entirely new regime.

10. As the GHS Regulation will be directly applicable in the UK, national legislation, such as CHIP, will eventually be replaced. The classification of chemicals also often acts as an important trigger for other legislative controls. HSE and other departments are reviewing what other pieces of legislation are likely to be affected and how they will need to change.

11. Once the Regulation has been adopted, the UK will need to introduce legislation to enforce it, including providing for penalties for non-compliance. There will be a transition period before GHS applies in full to allow Member States and industry to prepare for and implement the necessary changes. As currently drafted, the provisions of the GHS Regulation shall apply to substances 3 years after the entry into force of the REACH Regulation (1 June 2007), with the provisions applying to mixtures a further 4.5 years later.

### **Next Steps**

12. The European Commission is expected to publish its formal regulatory text and impact assessment at the end of February / start of March 2007. Formal negotiations are not expected until March 2007 at the earliest.

### **Action**

13. You are invited to:

- Raise awareness of the GHS among your members;
- Encourage your members to comment on the proposed Regulation and the UN GHS more broadly;
- Assess the potential cost and benefits of the GHS to UK business and contribute to the RIA (which HSE is currently preparing).

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