

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: OSHA's Revised Hazard Communication Standard – What is GHS?

[Reference 1910.1200 / 1926.59]

For many years now, employees could gather limited information about the hazardous chemicals they work with by looking at container labels and reading Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS's). However, there was no set format to govern how the companies that produced or distributed those chemicals categorized the hazards of their products, nor how the labels and MSDS's had to appear. The end result was a confusing mish-mash of information that often failed to help workers quickly discern the hazards of the products they were using.

To address this problem, OSHA recently revised their Hazard Communication Standard to align with the international "Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals", commonly referred to as "GHS". As a result, manufacturers and distributors of hazardous chemicals and products must begin to standardize how they categorize the hazards of their products, as well as the information and format of their container labels and Safety Data Sheets. Here is an overview of some of the changes you will start seeing very soon, if not already:

- "Material Safety Data Sheets" (MSDS's) will be replaced by "Safety Data Sheets" (SDS's);
- The new SDS's will be divided into 16 sections, with information about the product's chemical hazards appearing in a set order that is always the same for every sheet;
- Container labels will all display mandatory information, including a product identifier that is exactly the same as that appearing on the corresponding Safety Data Sheet (SDS);
- Container labels will also have standardized "signal words", "hazard statements", and "precautionary statements" to help insure you are alerted to applicable dangers and necessary safeguards you should follow when working with that product;
- All container labels will also display one or more of eight specific "pictograms", which are basically icons that appears in small red boxes that will help you to quickly identify the specific hazard or hazards associated with the product you are using.

OSHA has given employers until December 1, 2013 to train their employees on all of the required elements of the new labeling systems and Safety Data Sheets (SDS's). So our next few toolbox talks will focus more on the specifics of how the new hazard warning systems work. In the meantime, you will still see old labels and MSDS's around until the transition to the revised Hazard Communication Standard is fully implemented.

Any question or comment about why OSHA revised their Hazard Communication Standards to align with the Globally Harmonized System (GHS) of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals? Please be sure to sign-in on the training certification form.