

WHMIS TO GHS IS COMING. GET READY!

As the world shifts its attention to workplace safety, global standards are being developed to ensure there is a consistent level of safety communication between different countries. Canada is currently using WHMIS for its hazardous materials communication system, but there's a new player coming to town.

The Globally Harmonized System for Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS) is a hazardous materials communication system that will standardize hazardous materials management around the world. GHS ensures that the safe communication of hazardous materials is consistent between different countries, and protects workers who may handle these materials. Canada is expected to adopt GHS in the near future and your company is required to participate.

While Canada hasn't officially adopted GHS, other countries – such as the USA – have. This is important for your company to know if you plan on exporting or importing any controlled products. Countries which have adopted GHS will require certain elements in the classification, labelling, and safety data sheet (SDS) of the controlled product. SDSs have already begun to appear in Canada and workers require proper education in the new SDS requirements (see the CCOHS link at the end for more details).

Although GHS has not been officially adopted, some of its elements are already here in Canada and they require your attention. Here is some information to help you prepare:

What is GHS and why do we need it?

Imagine if everyone on Earth spoke the same language. Communication would be more efficient and there would be less room for misinterpretation — this is the concept behind GHS. GHS is a hazardous materials communication system that will standardize communication in every country and ensure the safe handling of hazardous materials by workers everywhere. In addition, companies can reduce their costs by not having to deal with different communication systems.

How will this affect me?

If your workplace currently uses any “controlled products” (i.e., any product that requires WHMIS labeling), then GHS affects you. Workers who handle these products must be trained in the new standards of GHS. WorkSafeBC will provide updates to WHMIS training and information resources once GHS is adopted.

What changes do I have to make?

There will be changes in standards for:

- Classification of hazardous materials
- Supplier labels
- Safety data sheets (SDSs), which will replace material safety data sheets (MSDSs)

Your workers will need to be trained on these changes to ensure safety and compliance. More information will be available through Health Canada at www.whmis.gc.ca as implementation draws closer.

What will happen to WHMIS?

WHMIS will still exist. GHS standards will simply be implemented into the existing WHMIS communication system.

Where can I get more information?

For specific details on GHS standards, please refer to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety's (CCOHS) GHS website at <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/ghs.html>

REFERENCES

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)

- WHMIS After GHS: How Suppliers Can Prepare
http://www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/whmis_ghs_suppliers/

Health Canada

- International Harmonization
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/occup-travail/whmis-simdut/ghs-sgh-eng.php>