What You Need to Know About GHS Labels

Safety Talk

The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) was created by the United Nations to help bring uniformity to hazardous materials labelling around the world. Canada will also implement the GHS, and details should start to appear over the next few months. Health Canada says it will work with the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to align and synchronize implementation of common classification and labeling requirements for workplace hazardous chemicals.

With the GHS system, certain information will appear on the label. For example, the chemical identity is required.

For labels, the hazard symbols, signal words, and hazard statements have all been standardized and assigned to each of the hazard categories and these should appear on GHS labels as indicated for each hazard class.

What's at Stake: Information required on a GHS label

1. Hazard Statements

Each hazard class is assigned a hazard phrase and category that describes the nature of the hazards of a hazardous product, including when appropriate, the degree of the hazard.

2. Signal words

The GHS signal words are "Danger" and "Warning." These signal words indicate the relative level of hazard severity. They are meant to alert the reader. "Danger" is for the more severe hazard categories.

3. Product Identifier

The label should include the chemical identity of the substance. For mixtures and alloys, the label should identify all chemicals that contribute to toxicity, skin corrosion or serious eye damage, germ cell mutagenicity, carcinogenicity, reproductive toxicity, skin or respiratory sensitization, or specific target organ toxicity (STOT).

Finally, the product identifier on the label should match the product identifier used on the SDS.

4. Precautionary statements

The label should include the precautionary phrase and pictogram describing how to prevent or minimize exposure to a hazardous product. The associated precautionary codes are used to identify precautionary statements for reference purposes. They should not be used to replace precautionary text.

5. Supplier identification

This section identifies the name, address and telephone number of the manufacturer.

Example:

A house painter does not familiarize himself with the new GHS labels. He does not know that there is a distinction between the hazard statements, “danger” and “warning”. He is working with a solvent in a container marked, “danger”. Typically, he uses a solvent with the label statement, “Warning”. One day he is supplied with a new solvent featuring the label statement, “Danger”. As usual, he opens the container in preparation for the day’s work. He steps aside to smoke a cigarette, as he has done many times in the past. When he is finished, he throws his cigarette into the dirt fairly close to the solvent. It catches fire and burns the side of the house. The worker suffers burns to his hands.

Location of GHS information on the Label: How to Read the Label

GHS hazard pictograms, signal words and hazard statements are located on the label. The specific layout of information will depend on the distributor or a competent authority.

In addition to the basic required information, the distributor or competent authority may include supplemental information on the label. This information will not impede or contradict the required GHS information.

Color can be used on other areas of the label besides the pictogram as allowed by competent authorities.

Final Word:

Familiarize yourself with reading the new GHS labels before they are implemented in your workplace. If you work around hazardous materials, you will begin to see the new GHS labels in your workplace as your country works toward implementing the new standards and label requirements.