WHMIS Changes: 1988 to 2015



Safety Talk

The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, or WHMIS, was launched in 1988 and was recently updated to WHMIS 2015. It now incorporates new, global standards for hazard communication.

In this Safety Talk, we'll look at what WHMIS is, what the changes are for WHMIS 1988 to WHMIS 2015, and how these changes are important for you.

What Can Go Wrong
WHMIS ensures that you receive the correct information about hazardous products and chemicals used or located in your workplace. As product manufacturers and suppliers transition from WHMIS 1988 to WHMIS 2015, you're going to encounter pictograms, labels, and safety data sheets (SDSs) following both standards. Knowing both sets of standards can mean the difference between being safe and risking your life.

How to Protect Yourself
You'll see changes in pictograms, labels, and SDSs and possibly see both standards at the same time. Let's look at each element and the changes in more detail.

Pictograms
First, all WHMIS 2015 pictograms are diamond-shaped with a red border. The biohazardous infections material pictogram and all WHMIS 1988 pictograms are circular with a black border.

Labels
First, signal words and supplemental information are found on WHMIS 2015 but not on WHMIS 1988 labels. Second, two WHMIS 1988 elements are categorized differently on WHMIS 2015 labels.

WHMIS 2015	WHMIS 1988

Hazard Statements	Risk Phrases
Precautionary Statements	Precautionary Measures First Aid Measures

Second, acutely toxic hazards and biohazardous infectious material hazards have similar symbols but are described differently in WHMIS 2015. In WHMIS 1988, acutely toxic hazards were “poisonous and infectious material causing immediate and serious effects” and biohazardous infectious material hazards were ‘poisonous and infectious material – biohazardous infectious material.’

Third, three hazards have both a different symbol and description in WHMIS 2015: irritant hazards, health hazards, and explosive hazards. Finally, flammables, oxidizers, compressed gas, and corrosives have both a similar symbol and description in WHMIS 1988.

Third, a hatched border around WHMIS 1988 labels is not required in WHMIS 2015 labels. Finally, the product identifier, pictogram, and supplier identifier are similar in both WHMIS 1988 and WHMIS 2015 labels.

Safety Data Sheets (SDSs)
First, there are many similarities. Nine sections remain the same. There are, however, four new sections in WHMIS 2015:

1. Hazard identification
2. Ecological information
3. Transport information, and
4. Regulatory information

There’s also one section of the WHMIS 1988 MSDS, preventive measures, which has been expanded to four separate sections in WHMIS 2015:

1. Accidental release measures
2. Handling and storage
3. Exposure control/personal protection
4. Disposal considerations

Finally, updates to labels by suppliers has changed from “when practical” in WHMIS 1988 to “within 90 days” in WHMIS 2015.

FINAL WORD
When looking at a pictogram, label or SDS, you should be able to spot the difference between the old system, WHMIS 1988, and the new, WHMIS 2015. Knowing the difference might save a life – maybe even yours!