

GLOBALLY HARMONIZED SYSTEM OF CLASSIFICATION AND LABELLING OF CHEMICALS (GHS)

First revised edition



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FOREWORD

1. The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) is the culmination of more than a decade of work. There were many individuals involved, from a multitude of countries, international organizations, and stakeholder organizations. Their work spanned a wide range of expertise, from toxicology to fire protection, and ultimately required extensive goodwill and the willingness to compromise, in order to achieve this system.

2. The work began with the premise that existing systems should be harmonized in order to develop a single, globally harmonized system to address classification of chemicals, labels, and safety data sheets. This was not a totally novel concept since harmonization of classification and labelling was already largely in place for physical hazards and acute toxicity in the transport sector, based on the work of the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (UNCEDTG). Harmonization had not been achieved in the workplace or consumer sectors, however, and transport requirements in countries were often not harmonized with those of other sectors in that country.

3. The international mandate that provided the impetus for completing this work was adopted in the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), as reflected in Agenda 21, para.19.27:

"A globally harmonized hazard classification and compatible labelling system, including material safety data sheets and easily understandable symbols, should be available, if feasible, by the year 2000".

4. The work was coordinated and managed under the auspices of the Interorganization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) Coordinating Group for the Harmonization of Chemical Classification Systems (CG/HCCS). The technical focal points for completing the work were the International Labour Organization (ILO); the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (UNSCETDG).

5. Once completed in 2001, the work was transmitted by the IOMC to the new United Nations Economic and Social Council's Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (UNSCEGHS). This Sub-committee was established by the Council's resolution 1999/65 of 26 October 1999 as a subsidiary body of the former UNCETDG, which was reconfigured and renamed at the same occasion "Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals" (UNCETDG/GHS). The Committee and its sub-committees work on a biennium basis.

6. The UNSCEGHS is responsible for maintaining the GHS and promoting its implementation. It provides additional guidance as needs arise, while maintaining stability in the system to encourage its adoption. Under its auspices, the document is regularly revised and updated to reflect national, regional and international experiences in implementing requirements into national, regional and international laws, as well as experiences of those doing the classification and labelling.

7. The first task of the UNSCEGHS was to make the GHS available for worldwide use and application. The first version of the document, which was intended to serve as the initial basis for the global implementation of the system, was approved by the Committee of Experts at its first session (11-13 December 2002) and published in 2003 under the symbol ST/SG/AC.10/30. At its second session (10 December 2004), the Committee of Experts adopted a set of amendments to the GHS, which were consolidated in document ST/SG/AC.10/32/Add.3 and ST/SG/AC.10/32/Add.3/Corr.1. This first revised version of the GHS takes account of all these amendments, which also include new provisions for aspiration hazards and guidance on the use of precautionary statements and pictograms and on the preparation of Safety Data Sheets (SDS's).

8. In paragraph 23 (c) of its Plan of Action adopted in Johannesburg on 4 September 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development encouraged countries to implement the new GHS as soon as possible with a view to having the system fully operational by 2008. Subsequently, in its resolution 2003/64 of 25 July 2003, the United Nations Economic and Social Council invited Governments to take the necessary steps, through appropriate national procedures and/or legislation, to implement the Globally Harmonized System as soon as possible and no later than 2008. It also invited the regional commissions, United Nations programmes, the specialized agencies and other organizations concerned to promote the implementation of the Globally Harmonized System and, where relevant, to amend their respective legal international instruments addressing transport safety, work safety, consumer protection or the protection of the environment so as to give effect to the Globally Harmonized System through such instruments.

9. While governments, regional institutions and international organizations are the primary audiences for the GHS, it also contains sufficient context and guidance for those in industry who will ultimately be implementing the national requirements which are adopted. Availability of information about chemicals, their hazards, and ways to protect people, will provide the foundation for national programmes for the safe management of chemicals. Widespread management of chemicals in countries around the world will lead to safer conditions for the global population and the environment, while allowing the benefits of chemical use to continue. Harmonization will also have benefits in terms of facilitating international trade, by promoting greater consistency in the national requirements for chemical hazard classification and communication that companies engaged in international trade must meet.

10. This publication has been prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), which provides secretariat services to the Committee of Experts.

11. Additional information on the work of the Committee and its sub-committees, as well as corrigenda which would be issued after publication of this document, may be found on the UNECE Transport Division web site at the following addresses <http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/danger.htm> and http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_welcome_e.html.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Part 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 1.1 Purpose, scope and application of the GHS	3
Chapter 1.2 Definitions and abbreviations.....	11
Chapter 1.3 Classification of hazardous substances and mixtures.....	17
Chapter 1.4 Hazard communication: Labelling	23
Chapter 1.5 Hazard communication: Safety Data sheets (SDS).....	35
Part 2. PHYSICAL HAZARDS	41
Chapter 2.1 Explosives	43
Chapter 2.2 Flammable gases	51
Chapter 2.3 Flammable aerosols.....	55
Chapter 2.4 Oxidizing gases	61
Chapter 2.5 Gases under pressure	65
Chapter 2.6 Flammable liquids	69
Chapter 2.7 Flammable solids.....	73
Chapter 2.8 Self-reactive substances and mixtures.....	77
Chapter 2.9 Pyrophoric liquids	81
Chapter 2.10 Pyrophoric solids.....	83
Chapter 2.11 Self-heating substances and mixtures.....	85
Chapter 2.12 Substances and mixtures which, in contact with water, emit flammable gases	89
Chapter 2.13 Oxidizing liquids	93
Chapter 2.14 Oxidizing solids.....	97
Chapter 2.15 Organic peroxides.....	101
Chapter 2.16 Corrosive to metals.....	105

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont'd)

	Page
Part 3. HEALTH HAZARDS	107
Chapter 3.1 Acute toxicity	109
Chapter 3.2 Skin corrosion/irritation.....	123
Chapter 3.3 Serious eye damage/eye irritation.....	137
Chapter 3.4 Respiratory or skin sensitization	151
Chapter 3.5 Germ cell mutagenicity	159
Chapter 3.6 Carcinogenicity.....	167
Chapter 3.7 Reproductive toxicity	175
Chapter 3.8 Specific target organ systemic toxicity – Single exposure	187
Chapter 3.9 Specific target organ systemic toxicity – Repeated exposure	199
Chapter 3.10 Aspiration hazard.....	211
Part 4. ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS	217
Chapter 4.1 Hazardous to the aquatic environment	219
ANNEXES	239
Annex 1 Allocation of label elements.....	241
Annex 2 Classification and labelling summary tables	265
Annex 3 Precautionary statements and precautionary pictograms.....	305
Annex 4 Guidance on the preparation of Safety Data Sheets	375
Annex 5 Consumer product labelling based on the likelihood of injury.....	395
Annex 6 Comprehensibility testing methodology.....	401
Annex 7 Examples of arrangements of the GHS label elements	417
Annex 8 An example of classification in the Globally Harmonized System.....	427
Annex 9 Guidance on hazards to the aquatic environment.....	437
Annex 10 Guidance on transformation/dissolution of metals and metal compounds in aqueous media.....	525