

COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE TRANSPORT OF DANGEROUS GOODS AND ON THE GLOBALLY HARMONIZED SYSTEM OF CLASSIFICATION AND LABELLING OF CHEMICALS

Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally
Harmonized System of Classification
and Labelling of Chemicals

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GHS

Cooperation with other international organizations

Cooperation between the World Health Organization on and the United Nations Sub-Committee of Experts on the GHS

Transmitted by the World Health Organization

Purpose

1 The purpose of this information document is to provide an update on the status of the work of the World Health Organization (WHO) in respect of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling (GHS) and to foreshadow some of the particular opportunities arising that might be considered in any future working relationship with the Sub-Committee.

Background

2. The WHO is committed to assisting countries in implementing the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) through its ongoing work and in cooperation with organizations such as the Organization for Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). WHO is a participant in the Global WSSD Partnership and regularly shares information and collaborates with the UNITAR/ILO GHS Capacity Building work. WHO's efforts to assist countries to implement the GHS are carried out through the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS).

3. WHO is taking steps to adapt its existing chemical safety recommendations, codes and guidelines to the GHS, in accordance with ECESOC Resolution 2003/53.

4. The 2005-2006 workplan of the SubCommittee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (SCEGHS) includes an action to explore a working relationship with WHO/IPCS to assist implementation of the GHS in relevant activities/instruments among global health partners.

Status of work to implement the GHS in WHO relevant instruments

5. WHO has a global leadership role to provide technical support and to develop norms and standards in relation to assessing and managing environmental risks to health. In 2004, with the support of the Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, IPCS commissioned a review of its instruments in order to identify those most relevant to GHS implementation and the opportunities, through these instruments, to assist countries implement the GHS.

6. This work identified three principal instruments:

- **WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard**, established by the World Health Assembly in 1975 and used extensively by developing countries to support the safe management of pesticides. Part 1 of the document describes the criteria and their application in classifying pesticides by hazard. Part 2 of the document lists the pesticides by hazard classification provides guidance on the classification of formulations. The list of classified pesticides is updated periodically.
- **Concise International Assessment Documents (CICADs)** are a series of internationally peer reviewed documents that describe the hazards, dose/response, exposure and risk characterization of priority chemicals. They are based on existing national or regional chemical assessment documents.
- **International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC)** are produced in a collaborative effort with the International Labor Organization with the support of the European Commission. They provide essential health and safety information on chemicals to promote their safe use and are written according to a system of standardized phrases. ICSC are peer reviewed by a network of participating institutions and collaborating centres and are available in 17 languages. Over 1600 ICSC have been prepared to date. The cards are accessible through the IPCS, ILO and US NIOSH web sites and those of participating institutions.

7. In 2005 and 2006 began to discuss the relevance of the GHS to these instruments, to engage relevant expert groups in these discussions and to begin to understand the scope of work needed to be done to align the instruments with the GHS. Based on these discussions WHO is preparing an implementation plan for this work and to secure the necessary additional resources for its completion by 2008.

8. Continued effort to raise awareness among the experts that contribute to these instruments is necessary as the majority have not been party to GHS deliberations to date. WHO is interested in participating in pilot classification projects and will encourage participation of relevant expert groups in such exercises.

Particular opportunities for GHS Implementation

9. All three of the existing WHO instruments provide significant opportunities for supporting countries in implementing the GHS since they are all concerned with establishing internationally peer-reviewed reference materials on chemical hazards.

WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard

10. The WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard is a key instrument for assisting with the international harmonization of pesticide registration and for strengthening the global management of pesticides particularly among developing countries. As well as aligning the existing acute classification criteria used by the instrument there is the opportunity for including additional reference material.

International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC)

11 Experts involved in ICSC production have worked for many years to develop a set of over 1600 ICSC in 17 languages. Their experience in the application, translation and updating of a set of standard phrases covering the physico-chemical, toxicological and precautionary advice is directly relevant to the work of the SCEGHS. Over the years a database of standard phrases has been maintained for the ICSC system which links the standard phrases to specific chemicals for which ICSC exist. This reference library when aligned with the GHS will provide a significant source of hazard and precautionary information. The ICSC expert group has already started in 2006 to assign GHS classifications to new and updated Cards

12. In order to fully utilize the work done to date, work is underway to move the established database to a new database environment housed at ILO. This will allow further refinement of the ICSC system and an increase in the overall consistency with which the information presented on the cards is expressed in English and in other languages. The work to move the existing ICSC to a GHS compatible system can be more efficiently carried out in this new operating environment and the lessons learned in this move may be useful to the UNSCEGHS in its revision of Annex 1, 2 and 3 of the GHS and for addressing in a systematic way opportunities for reducing any redundancy in Annex 3 (e.g. those expressed by the concerns such as those of the of the EC in UN/SCEGHS/12/INF6).

13. WHO has already used the input of the ICSC expert group, as well as its global network of poisons centres, in its contributions through SCEGHS to the preparation of Annex 3 of the GHS. The ongoing work of the ICSC expert group in assigning precautionary advice to specific chemicals provides an established reference point, and mechanism for the possible further refinement of Annex 3. This body of expert advice on precautionary statements may be a unique source of future advice to the SCEGHS.

Conclusions

15. In the context of discussions of the programme of work 2007-2009, WHO would welcome the opportunity to continue its working relationship with the UNSCEGHS. WHO sees its work on maintaining a set of International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC), the WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard and Concise International Chemical Assessment Documents (CICADs) as particularly relevant to such a relationship. These activities enable WHO to raise awareness among experts from developed and developing countries about the GHS and to continue to strengthen existing reference materials on chemical hazards and precautionary advice.

16. In addition the system of maintaining ICSC provides some unique opportunities for implementation and maintenance of the GHS through provision of reference sets of information on certain chemicals e.g. pesticides and other chemicals of international concern.

Next Steps

17. WHO will continue to keep UNSCEGHS informed of its work in moving its three existing instruments to full alignment with the GHS and, in the context of the work programme for the next biennium, would welcome the opportunity to more precisely identify opportunities developing a relationship with the UNSCEGHS.

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