



■ *Related Topics* Globally Harmonized System , Hazard communication , Right to know (Hazard Communication)

Globally Harmonized System (GHS)

What is it?

The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals, or GHS for short, is an effort to create a world-wide, universal chemical hazard communication and container labeling system. The large number of different chemical hazard identification, labeling, and information requirements around the world create potential barriers to trade in chemicals, particularly for small businesses. Thus a harmonized and consistent approach would be beneficial both in terms of worker protection and trade.

The GHS provides standardized definitions for chemical hazards, such as flammable liquids. The GHS also provides a classification of chemicals by types of hazard and proposes standardized hazard communication element labels and safety data sheets.

A voluntary system

The GHS is not a standard nor does it impose requirements on those countries which adopt it, such as a trade agreement would. It is a voluntary set of “building blocks” which each country can adopt as it sees fit.

For countries that do not have existing chemical hazard systems, and may not have the resources to develop and maintain one, availability of a globally harmonized approach will allow them to provide necessary protection for their citizens while enabling them to participate in international trade.

The revised HazCom standard

On March 26, OSHA published the final Hazard Communication Standard, which harmonized it with the GHS. The revised standard includes requirements for applying the harmonized GHS hazard classifications, format for Safety Data Sheets (SDSs), and standardized container label elements.

Phase-in dates for the revised standard are:

- Train employees on the new label elements and safety data sheet (SDS) format
- Compliance with all modified provisions of this final rule, except:
 - The Distributor shall not ship containers labeled by the chemical manufacturer unless it is a GHS label
- Update alternative workplace labeling and hazard communication program as necessary to provide additional employee training for newly identified physical or health hazards.

During the transition period to the effective completion dates noted above, chemical manufacturers, distributors, and employers may comply with either the old standard or the final standard, or both.