

Harmonic Hazard Communication FAQ

Training your employees on understanding chemical container labels and material safety data sheets (MSDSs) may not be music to your ears, but the Globally Harmonized System (GHS) is intended to bring harmony to the process. As the world moves toward GHS, your employees may be asking these questions:

Q: What is the purpose of the GHS?

A: The purpose of the GHS is to provide a comprehensive international system for defining health, physical, and environmental hazards of chemicals; classifying chemicals based on their specific hazards; and communicating hazard information and protective measures consistently throughout the world.

Q: Why is the GHS necessary?

A: The GHS is necessary because of a global economy in which chemicals are imported and exported among different countries around the world. With international trade in chemicals comes the risk that chemical suppliers in some countries might not do as good a job of identifying hazards of their products or of recommending precautions to prevent exposure to hazards - and that could put you and your co-workers at risk.

Q: How will the GHS make workplaces safer?

A: Implementation of the GHS is expected to create a safer work environment and reduce chemical exposures for workers in the United States and all over the world. It is believed that consistent and simplified communications about chemicals and safe work practices provided by the GHS will create greater awareness of hazards, resulting in safer use of chemicals in the workplace.

Q: What's the difference between the MSDS and the SDS?

A: The 16-section Safety Data Sheet (SDS) will replace the MSDS, although the two documents are basically the same. The primary differences between the two documents include how the documents are organized, the number and content of sections, the information included, and degree of detail presented. Despite these differences, however, the purpose of the SDS is the same as that of the MSDS-to provide safety, health, and environmental information about chemicals to help prevent accidents and exposures.