

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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CAPACITY BUILDING

GHS Workshop in Ecuador

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat participated in a 3 day GHS workshop organized by the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of the Ecuador within the framework of the “Short-Term Support Program for the Management of the Ministry of the Environment in the Area of Environmental Quality” with the financial support of the Government of the Netherlands under the Netherland’s Program (“Programa de Holanda”) and which took place in Quito, Cuenca and Guayaquil on 27, 28 and 29 March 2006 respectively.

The aim of the workshop was to present the GHS and raise awareness about its contents. It was addressed to a wide range of professionals from the public and private sectors concerned with the handling of chemicals and to the institutions responsible for the implementation of the system.

The presentation started with a brief summary of the history of the development of the GHS, its scope, purpose and application and continued with the detailed explanation of the different hazard classes and categories covered by the GHS, the classification criteria for substances and mixtures applicable for each hazard class and category; the description of the hazard communication elements (pictograms, signal words and precautionary statements) and the contents of Safety Data Sheet according to the GHS. An example of classification of a substance under the GHS was also given and the workshop ended with a brief information session about the status of implementation of the GHS in different countries.

About 80 people from different sectors and/or institutions attended the workshop. Those included representatives from several ministries (i.e.: Environment, Public Health, Foreign Trade, Industrialization, Fishing and Competitiveness, Agriculture, and Energy and Mines), the Environmental Protection Unit of the National Police, Industry Associations, the Ecuadorian Customs Corporation, the Ecuadorian Institute of Normalization, the Center of Cleaner Production, the National Council of Drugs Substances, Institutions of First Responders to Chemical Emergencies, the National Counsel of Transit and Terrestrial Transport, Private and Public Universities, Industry Chambers, Service of Customs’ Monitoring and the Municipalities of Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca.

After the presentation, time was allocated for questions and discussion. Workshop participants showed great interest in the system and it was recognized that its implementation would improve not only the protection of human health and the environment but also the safer use of chemicals and the facilitation of trade. However, it was also noted that the main obstacles for the GHS implementation in Ecuador would be lack of financial resources and expertise; lack of awareness, knowledge and information about the GHS and existing problems with the implementation of national legislation about chemicals and their transport;

There was great concern about implementation issues and in particular about the absence of a list of chemicals classified according to the GHS which could serve as a guide for those countries lacking expertise on classification and labelling. The problem of the comprehensibility of the GHS hazard communication elements was also raised and in particular the issue of the language used for the precautionary statements which may appear on the label of an imported chemical when the language of the manufacturer is different from the language of the final user.

As an outcome of the workshop, the representatives from the Ministry of the Environment expressed their willingness to raise awareness in their government to obtain political support to undertake GHS implementation activities, recognising at the same time that there was a need of support from donors and international organizations. They also said that they would consider membership of the Sub-Committee of Experts on the GHS, as well as application to become “pilot-country” for the implementation of the GHS in the region. They will also envisage studying the possibility of organizing other GHS events at national and regional level with the participation of other ANDEAN^a countries.

^a At present, the following States are members of the ANDEAN Community: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.