

UN/GHS-SC/1/INF.5

**Sub-Committee of Experts
on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification
and Labelling of Chemicals
(First session, 9-11 July 2001
agenda item 6)**

Cooperation with United Nations Organizations and Programmes, Specialized Agencies and Other Organizations

**Transmitted by the expert from the United States of America on behalf of the
experts from Brazil, Canada, Finland, Ireland, the United Kingdom
and the United States of America**

Introduction

1. The Interorganization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) Coordinating Group for the Harmonization of Chemical Classification Systems (CG/HCCS) was the international group responsible for managing and coordinating the development of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals. The CG/HCCS found that there was no one international organization that had all of the expertise necessary to develop the GHS. Therefore, the work was divided up among the organizations best able to address the different areas of concern. Referred to as focal points, these organizations completed the assigned technical work and forwarded it to the CG/HCCS. The CG/HCCS itself took on the responsibility to assemble the technical work of these different organizations to form the GHS.
2. The Terms of Reference for the UN Subcommittee of Experts on the GHS, as endorsed by the ECOSOC, anticipate a continuing role for these international organizations, both in the short term to complete the final work on the GHS, and in the long term, to provide the technical input needed to maintain and update the GHS in the future.
3. The UN Subcommittee of Experts on the GHS is therefore invited to acknowledge the work completed by the focal points and the CG/HCCS; to note the continuing work to complete the GHS; and to recognize the role of the focal points in updating the system in the future. In addition, the members of the UN Subcommittee of Experts on the GHS who have not been involved to date are invited to take part in the work to complete the GHS, as well as to participate in the work of the focal points on technical issues in the future.

International Organizations

4. The CG/HCCS divided the work among 3 international organizations ('focal points') as follows:
 - a) Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): Classification criteria for health and environmental hazards, including criteria for classification of mixtures.
 - b) United Nations Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (UNCETDG): Classification criteria for physical hazards.
 - c) International Labour Organisation (ILO): Classification criteria for physical hazards; harmonization of hazard communication elements.
5. Each of these organizations has addressed the work assigned within its own organizational structure. When completed, the work has been forwarded to the CG/HCCS to incorporate into the GHS. The work that has been completed, or is ongoing, is described for each organization below.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

6. The OECD established an Advisory Group (later called Task Force) on Harmonisation of Classification and Labelling (AG-HCL, later TF-HCL) to develop a harmonised classification system for chemicals. In the first stage the classification criteria were produced for substances presenting health or environmental effects, and extended later to cover also mixtures. The results of the work have been endorsed at various meetings by the OECD Joint Meeting and IOMC CG/HCCS. The final proposal of the Task Force for harmonised criteria, the "Integrated Document", covering hazards for substances and mixtures was endorsed by the OECD Joint Meeting in June 2001.
7. While classification criteria for the GHS have been agreed there are areas where work to update the GHS is already underway. Work has begun on developing classification criteria for the following health hazards of both substances and mixtures:
 - aspiration hazard
 - respiratory irritation hazard
 - water-activated toxic hazard.

A discussion is also ongoing about the need to address narcotic effects for classification purposes.

8. It has also been recognised in the GHS documents produced by the OECD and ILO that the classification criteria on sensitisers need to be re-examined, given the development of new testing methods for sensitisers and a need for reconsideration of the classification cut-offs for mixtures to take account of induction and elicitation effects.
9. It is proposed that the GHS-Subcommittee invite the OECD to finalise the work on the above mentioned hazards (para 7 above) , including re-examination of the classification criteria for sensitisers (para 8 above), and submit its proposals to the Subcommittee after consensus has been reached in OECD which is likely in 2002. Depending on the results of the discussions among experts, the criteria for narcotic effects should be developed if considered necessary by the experts and submitted to the Subcommittee by the end of 2002.
10. It is also proposed that the OECD be invited by the Subcommittee to take up the task of development of new criteria and updating of the existing GHS criteria for health and the environmental effects. To this end, the specific requests are to be made from the Subcommittee to the OECD as necessary.
11. The OECD should also be invited to report to the Subcommittee at its meetings, commencing in December 2001, on the arrangements to take forward and on the progress made. A regular reporting on the OECD work to the Subcommittee would provide an excellent opportunity to exchange views on development of the criteria and to the Subcommittee to contribute to the work as necessary.

United Nations Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (UNCETDG)

12. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UN Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (UNCETDG) established a working group for the Harmonization of Classification Criteria on Physical Hazards to develop globally harmonised criteria.

13. The working group reached an agreement in December 1997 on harmonised criteria for physical hazards, except criteria for flammable aerosols which will be discussed at the July 2001 meeting of the Working Group.
14. Following the decision of ECOSOC, UNCETDG has been restructured and the role of the previous Committee and Subcommittee on Transport has been assigned to the Subcommittee on Transport. The ILO no longer wishes to be involved in the technical work related to development and revision of classification criteria for physical hazards.
15. It is proposed that the GHS-Subcommittee invite the ILO/UNCETDG Working Group to finalise the work on flammable aerosols and to submit its proposals to the GHS Subcommittee.
16. It is also proposed that the GHS Subcommittee invite the Transport Subcommittee to work with the GHS Subcommittee to address any specific requests regarding new or updated physical hazard criteria. It is expected that this would involve establishing a joint Working Group with experts from Transport as well as other sectors to accomplish these tasks.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

17. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) established a working group for the Harmonization of Chemical Hazard Communication (ILO WG/HCHC) to develop globally harmonised hazard communication rules for hazardous substances and mixtures. The work is based on the globally harmonized hazard classification criteria for substances and mixtures presenting health or environmental effects developed by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the harmonized criteria for physical hazards developed by the joint ILO/UNCETDG working group on the Harmonization of Classification Criteria on Physical Hazards.
18. The globally harmonised hazard communication system consists of labels and Safety Data Sheets (SDS's) for hazardous substances and mixtures. The label elements of the Globally Harmonised System (GHS) are: product identifiers, hazard pictograms and symbols, signal words, hazard statements and precautionary statements.
19. An agreement was reached at the ILO working group in May 2001 on a system for harmonised hazard communication, although work on a new symbol for certain health hazards is still continuing and the work on precautionary statements is incomplete. The new symbol will be developed by September 2001 under the leadership of IOMC CG. IOMC CG HCCS endorsed the results of the ILO work in May 2001.
20. Further work on hazard communication elements needs to be done. This includes the harmonisation of precautionary statements for hazard communication and hazard communication tools for the endpoints still being developed as outlined above.
21. It is proposed that the GHS-Subcommittee invite the ILO to finalise the work on precautionary statements and to develop hazard communication rules corresponding to the new classification criteria that will be developed by the OECD and the ILO/UNCETDG Working Group. The ILO is asked to submit its proposals to the Subcommittee on precautionary statements and on hazard communication for flammable aerosols by July 2002. Taking into account the time schedule of the OECD work on the new classification criteria, proposals on hazard communication elements could be expected to be submitted to the Subcommittee in 2003.

22. It is also proposed that the ILO be invited to take up the task, as appropriate, of development of new elements of hazard communication and updating existing ones. To this end, the specific requests are to be specified by the GHS Subcommittee as necessary.

IOMC Coordinating Group for the Harmonization of Chemical Classification Systems (IOMC CG/HCCS)

23. The CG/HCCS has the mandate for completion of the GHS. The primary task remaining is to merge the technical work (as prepared by the focal points) into a single document with appropriate explanatory text. While this task began some time ago, it could not be completed until all of the technical work was done. Completion of the technical work occurred when the ILO Work Group finished most of the work on hazard communication in May and OECD its work on classification criteria in June. The Secretariats of the OECD and CG/HCCS have since prepared a consolidated criteria document. A Drafting Group of the CG/HCCS has assigned all tasks related to completing the GHS Document, hopefully by the end of 2001. The plan is to complete the work primarily by e-mail, without necessitating an additional meeting of the CG/HCCS if at all possible. However, members of the Drafting Group who are in Geneva for the GHS Subcommittee meeting will also be meeting in the margins to advance the work on the completion of the "GHS Document". When the "GHS Document" is completed, the CG/HCCS will have met its mandate and will no longer exist as a separate group.
24. In addition to the preparation of the "GHS Document" for submission to the GHS Subcommittee, there are two remaining issues to be resolved by the CG/HCCS. These were not completed at the May meeting. The first involves the shape of the border frame for symbols under the GHS. The ILO Work Group prefers a diamond-shaped frame with a broad, red border. However, since issues were raised by the air transport industry about possible confusion with the transport square-on-point frames, the CG/HCCS is referring this issue for further input from the Subcommittee on Transport, no later than their December meeting. A final decision will be made by the CG/HCCS after that meeting.
25. A second remaining issue involves establishment of an abstract symbol to convey chronic health hazards. The Work Group did not agree on a symbol, and the plan is to develop additional options, circulate them among CG/HCCS members, and have a recommended symbol by September 2001 to include in the papers submitted for the December GHS Subcommittee meeting.

Cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the ILO on Implementation and Capacity Building Issues

26. One of the primary aims of the GHS Subcommittee will be encouraging understanding and adoption of the completed GHS. The many benefits of the GHS will not be realized until there is widespread adoption of the system throughout the world.
27. UNITAR and ILO, in close collaboration with other IOMC Partner Organizations and the IFCS, have taken steps in 2000 towards initiating a training and capacity building programme to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition to address the challenges of chemical hazard communication and GHS implementation. The Programme will assist countries to develop and implement chemical hazard communication action plans through collaboration between various government bodies as well as parties outside of government.
28. This programme will include the provision of guidance, training materials, and training by experts from international organisations, countries and other interested parties. It will assist countries to: assess existing national capacity for hazard communication; conduct awareness-raising activities;

and train for chemical labelling and comprehensibility. Relevant training activities will cover topics such as classification of chemicals, labelling, safety data sheets (SDSs), as well as related support measures such as legislation, awareness raising, etc.

29. It is proposed that the GHS Subcommittee note this important work by UNITAR, ILO and IOMC Partner Organizations to promote and assist implementation of the GHS, and that they recognize UNITAR to continue developing these issues in cooperation with the GHS Subcommittee.

Proposal

30. While extensive work has been completed, there are remaining issues to be resolved and completed. It is proposed that the GHS Subcommittee acknowledge all of the work that has been done; note the need for continuing work as outlined for each organization above; and recognize the focal points, the CG/HCCS, and UNITAR to continue the work ongoing or planned as outlined in this document.
31. Each of the focal points should report to the GHS Subcommittee on the progress of the work, as well as the details of their deliberations, at each meeting of the GHS Subcommittee.
32. Future work in the focal points will be initiated by proposals from the GHS Subcommittee. If representatives of the focal points themselves, or experts from member countries, believe that new work is required in the areas addressed by each of the focal points, proposals will be made to the GHS Subcommittee. Upon agreement of the GHS Subcommittee that a proposal is appropriate, a request will be made to the relevant focal point to initiate the work.
33. GHS Subcommittee members from countries that have not been involved in the work of the focal points or the CG/HCCS are invited to participate in the ongoing and future work.
34. Work on the GHS already underway (see paras 7- 8, 15, 20, 23-25) should be completed and adopted no later than the end of 2002. The GHS Subcommittee should form a working party to prepare proposals on managing future work on updating and maintenance in more detail. The working party should also work with the Secretariat to prepare letters for the technical focal points and UNITAR regarding the work after 2002, and the relationship of the respective organizations, in accordance with the Terms of Reference for the GHS Subcommittee.

Justification for the Proposal

35. The GHS addresses complicated issues involving the appropriate classification of chemical hazards and communication of those hazards to those potentially exposed. In order to ensure the GHS was developed based on the best technical advice available, the work was divided among several international organizations with particular expertise in the work involved. The GHS Subcommittee's terms of reference anticipate this practice will continue: The Subcommittee shall up-date the system, as necessary, considering the need to introduce changes to ensure its continued relevance and practical utility, and determining the need for and timing of the updating of technical criteria, while working with existing bodies.
 36. In order to ensure a smooth transition, the GHS Subcommittee should acknowledge the completed and ongoing work, as well as establish a plan to continue this effective cooperation among focal points to ensure that the technical work continues to be done by those with the best expertise. In addition, the GHS Subcommittee should work in cooperation with UNITAR, ILO and other IOMC Partner Organizations to promote and assist widespread implementation of the GHS.
-