

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 Labeling of Chemicals

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GHS

Cooperation with other international organizations

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

Transmitted by the World Health Organization (WHO)

Purpose

1. The purpose of this document is to continue the practice of providing a regular update to the Sub-Committee on the status of the work being undertaken by World Health Organization (WHO) to assist implementation of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling (GHS).

Background

2. For WHO and its Member States, health is a key aspect of human security and a global health agenda to address the underlying determinants of health is being implemented. Setting norms and standards, promoting and monitoring their implementation, providing technical support, catalysing change and building sustainable institutional capacity are among WHO's core functions. These functions are critical to prevent disease through healthy environments. Dissemination and use of globally harmonized information about the hazards of chemicals is of high importance in this regard.

3. WHO has embraced the challenge of implementation of the GHS in accordance with:
 - ECOSOC Recommendations that all UN Programmes and specialized agencies take appropriate steps to amend their instruments to give effect to the GHS (ECOSOC Resolution 2005/53); and
 - Integrating implementation efforts with activities to enable best use of WHO chemical risk assessment products at the national level; and
 - A work plan of the UNSCEGHS for the biennium 2007 -2008 to explore a possible working relationship with WHO to assist implementation of the GHS in relevant activities/instruments among global health partners (UNSCEGHS ST/SG/AC.10/C.4/24).
4. As appropriate, WHO continues to work in cooperation with sister UN agencies (e.g. ILO, FAO, UNITAR) and under the auspices of the Inter Organization Programme of the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). WHO welcomes the opportunity to formally report on progress to the Sub-Committee.

Progress Report

5. Progress in relation to two WHO series of guidelines and instruments is reported below: the WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard; and the International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC).

WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard

6. This instrument was established by the World Health Assembly in 1975 (WHA 28.62). This instrument continues to be widely used, particularly by developing countries, to assist in the safe management of pesticides. It is implemented in a number of ways e.g. by reference in country legislation, in FAO guidelines and in guidelines for development assistance such as those established by the World Bank. The WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard provides a simple ranking system which lists the more or less hazardous forms of pesticides using a system of classification criteria for acute toxicity.
7. WHO has engaged a consultant to identify and review any inconsistencies between this instrument and the GHS. An implementation plan and transition arrangements are currently being considered. The next edition of the WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard will align the classification to that of the GHS for acute toxicity.
 - Technical work has largely been completed to form the basis for the new edition which will include a revised list of pesticides consistent with the GHS and new additions to the list proposed for consideration by WHO since the last edition. Initial analysis has shown that for the pesticides with the highest listing - **1A Extremely hazardous** - there will be very little or no impact. For the next hazardous listing **1B - Highly Hazardous**, again, very few changes in listing will be needed.
 - Before publishing the new edition, WHO will allow a period for consultation and for transitional implementation. This will, for example, allow time for users to identify whether any changes in listing will have unanticipated impacts on national laws or guidance or international documents that reference the WHO Classification of Pesticides by Hazard.

International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC)

8. International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC) are prepared and updated in a collaborative effort between the ILO and WHO with the support of the European Commission and a global network of participating institutions, experts in the field of toxicology, occupational health and safety, poisons centre experts and medical practitioners. The process involves wide peer review with an overall participation of equal numbers of institutions from OECD and non OECD countries.

9. ICSC provide essential health and safety information, including hazard information; information on signs and symptoms to help in the recognition of cases of inadvertent exposure; precautionary information in cases of fire, explosion, spillage, emergency response, storage, and environmental data. ICSC are prepared using a system of standard phrases and classification criteria published in a "Compilers Guide" (http://www.who.int/entity/ipcs/publications/icsc/comp_guide.pdf).

10. The ICSC are available free-of-charge in 24 languages. ICSC in 17 different languages are available on the internet : including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Swahili, Thai, Urdu, Vietnamese as well as many European languages. Very high usage rates are recorded, e.g. in 2006, the average was over 365,000 downloads per month from the ILO website (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/cis/products/icsc/index.htm>) and up to 72,000 sessions per month for the English versions from the IPCS INCHEM web site (<http://www.inchem.org>). The website of the US National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) is a further effective distribution channel providing linkages to the web sites of national participating institutes throughout the world and for the ICSC in languages other than English (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/ipcs/icstart.html>).

11. WHO has engaged a consultant to review and identify possible inconsistencies between the standard phrases and criteria used for compiling the ICSC and the GHS. Work is in hand to finalize changes to these criteria.

- Working Groups of experts involved in the ICSC process have been established to consider technical issues associated with the alignment of classification criteria and associated standard phrases on toxicity endpoints.
- Work has essentially been completed in the areas of carcinogenicity, mutagenicity and reproductive toxicity, target organ, systemic toxicity, eye and skin irritation/corrosivity and environmental hazards. Proposed changes to the standard phrases will be considered for adoption at a meeting planned for October 2007.
- Since 2005, and when undertaking peer review on new or updated cards, experts have begun to routinely discuss and consider the extent that data on individual chemicals meet the GHS criteria. Consistent with the inclusion of UN Transport classification on the ICSC it is planned to indicate this GHS on the ICSC in a separate GHS additional information field on the ICSC.

- Approximately 150 individual ICSC have been considered to date of which ICSC for 79 chemicals have met GHS classification criteria. This will thereby form a growing repository of GHS classification information for individual chemicals.

12. In addition to the above, new and significant database development work has been initiated. This has been necessitated to enable further efficiencies in the management of the ICSC process (which began using standalone PCs) and the preparation and peer review of ICSC. The new database will also facilitate translation of the ICSC by providing compilers and translators with a library of standard sentences, rather than sentence phrases.

- As a first step in the conversion process, all of the sentences used in the 1700 existing ICSC have been extracted to form a searchable list from which information can be obtained on the frequency of use of selected sentences and of the numerous actual combinations of core phrases. It is intended that this resource tool will be used to iron-out redundancies and improve the clarity of standard sentences in existing ICSC before uploading, translation and use in the new database. The improved database will ultimately provide a single source for all of ICSC language editions, fully searchable on the internet.
- The collection of downloaded sentences is also available to assist the work of the UNSCGHS correspondence group in reviewing the need for combined hazard and precautionary statements. WHO will be pleased to participate in the work of this correspondence group and to contribute its experience of assigning precautionary statements in the ICSC process.

13. The availability of the ICSCs as a multilingual resource for worker safety, as well as a resource for countries implementing the GHS will continue to be promoted by WHO staff in different fora, for example at capacity-building workshops concerning the GHS, management of chemical incidents, control banding etc.

Conclusion

WHO continues to make progress in its work on implementation of the GHS, subject to the availability of resources. Further consultation and information on the progress of the initiatives reported above will be made available through the WHO web site. UNSCEGHS will be notified of further progress expected before its next meeting and details provided of any consultative processes.