

UN/SCEGHS/5/INF.8

**Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally
Harmonized System of Classification
and Labelling of Chemicals**
(Fifth session, 7-9 July 2003,
agenda item 3)

Cooperation with other international organizations

GHS promotion/ IFCS Information Circular

Transmitted by the secretariat

For ease of information, the pages that follow contain a copy of the IFCS Information Circular Vol.3 N°4 (dated 2 June 2003), which informs about the GHS system.

IFCS has requested the IFCS National Focal Points to disseminate this Information Circular to appropriate individuals in their respective countries: national departments sharing responsibility for chemical safety (health, environment, agriculture, labour, transport, industry, etc) as well as non-governmental organizations active in the area.

Information Circular

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Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals

In December 2002, in Geneva, the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) was adopted after a decade of efforts and cooperation among a broad number of countries and organizations, notably the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the UN Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (CE TDG/GHS). A large part of the work was done under the umbrella of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Management of Chemicals (IOMC).

This new system aims at protecting people and the environment from the mismanagement of chemicals, classifying them according to their hazard and creating safety data sheets and a labelling system based on universally understandable pictograms. The GHS covers all hazardous chemicals. Target audiences for GHS include consumers, workers, transport workers and emergency response teams. The official text in English is available at the following internet address: <http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs.html> and can also be bought as a printed publication from the UN Sales Section: www.unece.org/pub_cat/index.htm. The GHS will also be made available in French by the end of June 2003.

The GHS system will be kept dynamic, regularly revised and made more efficient as experience is gained in its implementation. It has been placed under the responsibility of the UN Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (SCE GHS), an ECOSOC body serviced by the UNECE Transport Division. In its work programme for the next biennium, the SCEGHS has already included new elements regarding the updating and implementation of GHS (see the report of the 4th SCEGHS session at <http://www.unece.org/trans/main/dgdb/dgsubc4/c4rep.htm>). The next meeting of the SCEGHS will take place in Geneva, 7-9 July 2003.

The GHS is now ready for implementation, and should be fully operational worldwide by 2008, as requested by the World Summit on Sustainable Development's Plan of Implementation (para 23.(c)), adopted in Johannesburg on 4 September 2002 and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) Priorities for Action beyond 2000, adopted by Forum III in October 2000. The ECOSOC is expected to endorse the GHS at its meeting in July 2003. Pilot implementation projects have already been started in countries in different regions of the world, which are introducing the system in their national practices. UNITAR/ILO have been designated

as the focal point for capacity building for the work of the SCEGHS, and have developed draft guidance materials and initiated country-based pilot projects (<http://www.unitar.org/cwm>).

A workshop on opportunities and challenges related to the GHS under the auspices of the UNECE and co-sponsored by Canada, Finland, Germany (GTZ), the Society for Chemical Hazard Communication (SCHC), the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA), and UNITAR, will be held during the fourth session of the IFCS (Forum IV). Forum IV will be held in Bangkok, 1-7 November, 2003.

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International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSC)

The International Chemical Safety Card (ICSC) project is an undertaking of the International Program on Chemical Safety (IPCS). It is a contribution to the implementation of the recommendations made in Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 and in the IFCS Priorities for Action Beyond 2000, related to the harmonization of classification and labelling of chemicals and information exchange on toxic chemicals and chemical risks.

The ICSCs summarize essential health and safety information on chemical substances in a clear way, through standard phrases. These cards are peer-reviewed. They are intended for use at the shop-floor level by workers and by those responsible for safety and health in factories, agriculture, construction and any other place of work. They are also designed for use by the employer when providing information and instruction to workers.

To a large extent, the information provided in the ICSCs conforms to the 1990 ILO Convention (No. 170) and Recommendation (No. 174) on safety in the use of chemicals at work. However, the ICSCs have no legal status and should be seen as an international reference on chemical safety information. In May, 2003, it was agreed that the ICSCs will be updated to use GHS classification (with symbols).

The Cards are available free of charge on the Internet. Currently, there are 1305 ICSCs available. The Cards have been translated in 26 languages. Of these, 16 are available on the Internet.

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For further information, please visit:

www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/cis/products/icsc/index.htm

European Campaign to Combat Risks of Dangerous Chemicals in the Workplace

The first European-wide campaign to raise awareness of dangerous substances in the workplace was recently launched in May 2003 at the European Parliament. The campaign aims to educate companies about the risks and regulatory duties regarding employee exposure to chemicals in the workplace.

The campaign will take place in the 15 current EU member states as well as the 10 future member states that will join the EU next April. It will culminate in the European Week for Safety and Health at Work in October 2003.

Source: Environment News Service, May 16, 2003

For further information, please visit: www.agency.osha.eu.int

WSSD Global Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the GHS – First Meeting 10-11 July, 2003

The First Meeting of the Partners for the WSSD Global Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the GHS will be held 10-11 July, 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland. The Partnership Meeting is organized by UNITAR, in cooperation with ILO and OECD. It is expected to bring together governments, intergovernmental organizations, and stakeholders, including industry, public interest, consumers and labour organizations that may be in a position to support Partnership activities financially or through in-kind contributions. The meeting will take place following the semi-annual meeting of the UN ECOSOC GHS Subcommittee of Experts.

Information provided by: Craig Boljkovac and Jonathan Krueger, UNITAR

For more information, please visit: www.unitar.org/cwm

Global GHS Partnership Presented at CSD

UNITAR, along with the Governments of Switzerland and Zambia, and the ICCA, presented the Global GHS Partnership at the "Partnerships Fair" held during the 11th session of the CSD, held in early May 2003. The purpose of the Fair was to enable those with experiences or information about sustainable development partnerships, and those who wish to become involved in such partnerships, to meet and share experiences. At the Fair, the ICCA announced an initial financial contribution to the GHS Partnership. The Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape (BUWAL) also announced a second financial contribution to the Partnership. CSD took decisions outlining the role of partnerships, criteria and guidelines, reporting and activities aimed at strengthening partnerships.

Information provided by: Craig Boljkovac and Jonathan Krueger, UNITAR

For more information, please visit: www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd11/CSD11.htm

Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) Protocol Adopted

On 21 May 2003, on the occasion of the fifth Ministerial Conference, "Environment for Europe", in Kiev, Ukraine, 36 States and the European Community signed the new Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

For more information, please visit: www.unece.org/env/pp/
