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**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

Twelfth session, 12(p.m.)-14 December 2006  
Item 3(d) of the provisional agenda

**HAZARD COMMUNICATION ISSUES**

Labelling of very small packagings

Proposal for development of additional guidance on label format

Transmitted by the expert from Canada

**Introduction**

1. Paragraph 1.4.1.1 of the GHS describes the objectives of the work on the GHS for hazard communication: labelling. As one of the objectives of the work has been to develop a harmonized hazard communication system, including requirements for labelling, the GHS sets out standards for labels in Chapter 1.4.
2. To fulfil the goal of having as many countries as possible adopt the system, much of the GHS is based on approaches to make compliance with the system easier. Under the GHS, standardization is applied to hazard symbols, signal words, and hazard statements.
3. Although the GHS requires specified information on the label of a classified hazardous product, other than the requirement in GHS paragraph 1.4.10.5.4.1 to locate the hazard symbols, signal word, and hazard statements together, there is no specified label format with respect to the placement of hazard information, size, colour, contrast, font size, label shape, etc. There is also no label border requirement.

4. The Correspondence Group on Labelling has provided some guidance regarding the placement of information on labels as issues have been raised about the relationship of transport information to information from other sectors on labels that have both on a single container. UN/SCEGHS/7/INF.26 was the most recent document on this subject and it expressed that countries should gain experience in the implementation of the GHS before deciding what additional guidance may be required.
5. The purpose of this paper is to compare the current requirements for labelling of work place and consumer products in Canada to the GHS requirements, to propose that additional guidance on label format is needed for effective GHS implementation, and to request that this issue be included on the UN Sub-Committee of Experts for the GHS (UNSEGHS) Programme of Work for the next biennium.

### **Considerations and Justification**

6. The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) is Canada's national hazard communication standard. The key elements of the system are cautionary labelling of containers of WHMIS "controlled products", the provision of material safety data sheets (MSDSs) and worker education programs.
7. The *Controlled Products Regulations* (CPR), established under the authority of the federal *Hazardous Products Act*, provide for specific requirements for the labelling of hazardous materials sold or imported for use in a work place in Canada. These regulations require that the specified hazard information (including the material and supplier identifier, hazard symbol(s), risk phrase(s), precautionary measures, first aid measures, and reference to the MSDS) be enclosed within a distinctive "hatched" border. The "hatched" border is required to be of a specific shape and in a colour that contrasts with the background of the label. Information not relating to WHMIS requirements must not appear within the border.
8. The CPR further stipulate that information required to be disclosed on the label of a WHMIS controlled product or container in which a controlled product is packaged shall be clearly and prominently displayed, easily legible and contrasted with other information on the controlled product or container. Any hazard symbol that is required to be displayed on a label shall, except with respect to size and colour, be an exact reproduction of that hazard symbol as depicted in the CPR and be displayed in a colour that is not likely to create confusion with a safety mark required by the *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Regulations*.
9. The labelling specifications were established based on recommendations from stakeholders, including representatives from organized labour, suppliers, employers, and federal, provincial, and territorial occupational safety and health government agencies, during the development of WHMIS. It is of key importance that a hazard communication system effectively communicates the relevant information to the recipient. A worker handling dangerous products must be able to quickly consult information on hazards, precautions, and first aid. WHMIS stakeholders unanimously agreed that there was a need for specific requirements for label design to prevent the hazard information from

being dispersed throughout the label and/or interspersed with other information that is not required by the CPR. Therefore, it was agreed that information required to be disclosed on the container of a WHMIS controlled product should be grouped together and enclosed within a distinctive border.

10. In a similar fashion to the CPR, the *Consumer Chemicals and Containers Regulations, 2001* (CCCR, 2001) is also established under the authority of the HPA (under Items 1 and 2 of Schedule I, Part II). The CCCR, 2001 provides specific requirements for the labelling and packaging of potentially hazardous consumer chemical products as well as their containers. These regulations require the addition of certain labelling elements depending on the classification of a product under the CCCR, 2001. Labelling elements include: hazard symbols, signal words, primary hazard statements, specific hazard statements, negative & positive instructions, first aid statements, and a border to encompass (and to highlight) some of this material. In order to ensure that the information is readily accessible through the visibility of these labelling elements there are specific mandatory requirements in the regulations regarding the size of the symbols and fonts of the warnings. In addition, the regulations dictate where the information must be located on the label, with specific legibility, contrast, and permanency requirements.
11. Other countries and agencies have adopted some of the same principles in their labelling legislation or guidelines.
12. Other than the requirement for the hazard symbols, signal word, and hazard statement to be located together on the label, the GHS does not provide sufficiently detailed guidance to ensure that all hazard information will be grouped together and clearly distinguishable from other label information. As a result, there is major concern amongst Canadian stakeholders that upon implementation of the GHS, hazard information on labels may not be prominent and distinct which could result in workers and consumers not being able to quickly locate this information. Since the label is the first line of defense for the public, including workers, this could lead to a lowering of protection which would be inconsistent with one of the established principles of harmonization described in GHS paragraph 1.1.1.6 (“the level of protection offered to workers, consumers, the general public and the environment should not be reduced as a result of harmonizing the classification and labelling systems”).
13. The lack of clear guidance could also impact international harmonization as different countries may specify different layouts or allow supplier discretion, which could lead to inconsistencies in labelling from one country to another.
14. These concerns could be addressed by developing detailed guidance on label format prior to the implementation of the GHS in Canada.

### **Proposal**

15. In order to not reduce the value of the label for the communication of hazard information, specific requirements need to be established to ensure that hazard information on labels

remains prominent and distinct. It is proposed that this issue be included on the UNSEGHS Programme of Work for the next biennium.

16. It is further proposed that consideration be given to the following recommendations, which were unanimously agreed to by WHMIS stakeholders, when developing additional guidance on label format:
- (a) all hazard information should be located together on the label in a specified area;
  - (b) a border, (though not necessarily a “hatched” border), should be employed on the label to make the hazard information prominent and distinct from other label information; and
  - (c) barring the requirement to include a distinctive border, clear guidance should be established to ensure that the hazard information on labels is clearly and prominently displayed and is distinguishable from other label information.
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