



# Globally harmonised system of classifying and labelling of chemicals (GHS) Overview

## Introduction

The acronym GHS stands for The Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals. The system was developed by the United Nations, with the intention of harmonising the many different chemical classification systems in use around the world. The system can be implemented in sectors relating to workers, consumers, transport and the environment.

## Benefits of adopting the GHS

There are expected to be a variety of benefits including:

- Enhanced health and environmental outcomes through providing an internationally consistent and well understood system
- Facilitating trade (reduced need to re-classify and re-label)

- Reduce the need for chemical testing against many classification systems
- Assist developing countries by providing an 'off the shelf' classification and labelling system.

## Australia adopting the GHS in workplaces

The draft Work Health and Safety Regulations require chemicals to be classified in accordance with the GHS, and the labelling and safety data sheet (SDS) requirements are also harmonised with GHS requirements. These draft regulations could be modified as a result of public comment during early 2011.

For storage and handling the GHS will be used. Transport will continue to use the existing system based on the *Australian Dangerous Goods Code*.

## The current status of the GHS in WA

On 10<sup>th</sup> December 2010, a number of amendments to the *OSH Regulations 1996* were gazetted. These provide chemical manufacturers and importers the option of using GHS based classification and labelling systems, or continuing to use the previous classification and labelling systems. Interim regulatory changes were considered necessary as some countries have already adopted the GHS, and the changes may reduce costs to chemical importers/exporters.

The impact on most workplaces should be minimal. People may see some different pictograms (diamond shaped symbols) on labels and MSDS. MSDS may refer to a classification under the GHS instead of by the criteria of NOHSC/Safe Work Australia and have GHS-based risk and safety (hazard and precautionary) phrases. In general, substances that are hazardous under the NOHSC criteria will be hazardous according to the GHS. MSDS will still be in the Australian 16-header format.

Chemical manufacturers or importers now have a choice of classification system. This may save them time in

classifying imports that have already been classified to the GHS. Or if they export to Europe, they may choose to use the GHS both for local and export products, again saving time and effort in classification. If they do not wish to use the GHS at this time, they can continue as they were.

## What is the expected impact of implementing the GHS aspects of the draft Work Health and Safety Regulations?










The basic duties in relation to hazardous chemicals, including identifying hazards through obtaining safety data sheets and correct labelling, assessing risks, training staff, and implementing appropriate controls will not be affected. During worker training, the new pictograms, label format and hazard statements should be discussed.

Over a period of time, chemical importers or manufacturers will be required to reclassify their chemicals in accordance with GHS criteria, and update the safety data sheets and labels for those which are hazardous. The phase in time is still to be determined.

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## What pictograms will be used and what do they mean?

The GHS pictograms are illustrated below. Where there is a similar dangerous goods pictogram available, that is an acceptable alternative.

 <p><b>Explosive</b></p>	 <p><b>Acute toxicity</b></p>	 <p><b>Chronic health hazard</b> (Carcinogen, mutagen, reproductive toxin, respiratory sensitiser, target organ toxin, aspiration toxicity.)</p>
 <p><b>Corrosive</b> (Skin, eye or metals)</p>	 <p><b>Irritant</b> (Skin, respiratory or eye irritant, skin sensitiser, acute toxicity category 4)</p>	 <p><b>Oxidiser</b></p>
 <p><b>Gas under pressure</b></p>	 <p><b>Flammable</b> (Flammable liquid, flammable solid, flammable gas, self reactive, pyrophoric, self heating, emits flammable gas, organic peroxide)</p>	 <p><b>Environmental hazard</b></p>

## Where to find the GHS

[www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs\\_rev03/03files\\_e.html](http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_rev03/03files_e.html)

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