

Brief summary - Globally Harmonised System (GHS)

European Union (EU) Regulation 1272/2008 introduced new legislation for classification labeling and packaging (CLP) of chemicals. This lengthy document of 1355 pages was amended in 2009 by regulation 790/2009 which was another 439 pages. These regulations introduce significant changes to the way that hazardous substances are classified and labelled and it adopts the internationally accepted globally harmonised system (GHS) which will eventually be used worldwide.

Chemical risk and safety phrases will be replaced by hazard and precaution codes and these changes will affect both labels on containers and packaging of chemicals as well as in safety data sheets. The hazard pictograms will also change.

The changes will be introduced over the next five years. Labels for single substances will change first. Currently **either** the CLP label or GHS may be used but from 1 December 2010, only GHS labels will be permitted for chemicals placed on the EU market after this date (existing stocks in the EU do not need to be relabelled).

Labels for mixtures of chemicals have a little longer. At present, either the current CLP system or GHS may be used but only GHS will be permitted for mixtures placed on the EU market after 1 June 2015.

The requirements for classification of chemicals (e.g. on safety data sheets) is slightly different. For single substances **both** the CLP system and GHS classifications should be used from 1 December 2010 until 1 June 2015 and thereafter only GHS. Until 1 June 2015, the GHS classification of mixtures is optional but after this date, GHS only must be used.

One change that could affect distributors is that all suppliers shall change labels and datasheets of chemicals if the classification of the chemicals is changed and this must be done within 18 months (Article 30).

Some of the classification changes may be rather confusing. For example category 2 carcinogens will become category 1B carcinogens.

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