

Labels - Fewer Signal Words & New Pictograms

[This is the first module explaining changes in OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard. Note that these HCS label changes are mandatory only for non-pesticide chemicals in the workplace. EPA regulates pesticides and is not requiring pesticide manufacturers to make these changes.]

The most visible changes to chemical labels under OSHA's new Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) are the change in signal words and their new accompanying pictograms.

Signal Words: "Caution" May Be Missing- You're familiar with the three signal words that designate the level of hazard of a chemical: Caution, Warning, Danger. One of these words appears on the front of a chemical's label to alert the reader to a potential hazard on the label, and its seriousness. To follow the Global Harmonized System (GHS) of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals, OSHA has eliminated the "Caution" signal word on chemical labels. There will be one of two signal words, "Warning" or "Danger," on labels of non-pesticides. Pesticide labels will retain the "Caution" designation and each pesticide will have just one of the original three signal words on the label.

On non-pesticides, "Warning" indicates a less severe hazard, while "Danger" indicates a more severe hazard. There will only be one signal word on a chemical's label, no matter how many different hazards the chemical may have. The signal word that designates the highest level of hazard is the one that appears. In other words, if a chemical has a corrosion hazard that justifies a "Warning" signal word, but that same product also has a health hazard that requires a "Danger" signal word, the "Danger" warning is the one that will appear on the label.

Since pesticide labels are not changing, the signal word on OSHA's new Safety Data Sheet (formerly the MSDS) for a pesticide may not match the signal word on the pesticide's label. This will be especially true for those pesticides currently bearing a "Caution" signal word. Their Safety Data Sheets will have a "Warning" signal word instead.

Pictograms: Universally Understood Symbols - It's the hope of the international GHS system that workers throughout the world will soon understand a chemical's hazards simply by seeing the harmonious (universal) pictograms on its label. For example, a chemical with a fire hazard will have the same *Flame* pictogram (see above) on its label in Africa as it does in America.

Pictogram graphics must follow strict rules. The symbol must have a white background framed by a red diamond border (no black borders allowed). The specific hazard symbol inside the red border must be black. There are 9 different pictograms, each designating a different hazard. They are required to be in place on all non-pesticide chemical labels as of June 1, 2015. In the next issue, you will see pictures of each of the 9 pictograms and a listing of the hazards they represent.

