

Labels - New HCS Labels Are More User-Friendly

[This is the fifth 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. See Techletter, July 7, 2013 for the introduction to OSHA's training requirements for technicians.]

How the Label is Created - It's up to the manufacturer or importer of a hazardous chemical to make sure its product's label follows the criteria set up by OSHA. The manufacturer or importer must evaluate the chemical's hazards based on available scientific data, and then come up with a hazard classification for the product based on OSHA's guidelines. Once the chemical product has a hazard classification, the manufacturer plugs in OSHA's criteria to find out precisely what the required signal word should be, which pictograms to use, and the specific hazard statements and precautionary statements that must appear on the label.

Hazard Statements are Standardized - A chemical might have several health or other types of hazards. The revised standard requires that hazard information be provided to the user with quick visual graphics, called *pictograms*, that will provide immediate recognition of the hazards. For each hazard there will be a descriptive pictogram on the label, as well as a hazard statement matched to the pictogram that further describes the particular hazard. Even though a chemical might have several hazards, it will have only one signal word, either Warning or Danger. The signal word that appears on the label is the one associated with the most severe of the several hazards.

Label preparers may combine statements on a label for clarity if the statements have similar warnings. For example, if a product has three slightly different warning statements about getting the chemical on skin, or on hair, or on clothes, these can be combined into one warning statement for all three using the most restricted wording of the three, or using the wording that provides the greatest level of safety.

Workers Benefit From the Revision - One of the primary purposes of the revised Hazard Communication Standard and its label changes is to ensure consistency in the classification and labeling of all non-pesticide hazardous chemicals. As a result of the new label changes, workers will be better able to understand how to safely handle and use hazardous chemicals because the hazards will be pictured and described in the same way on all product labels.

According to OSHA, the changes in labels and their accompanying Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) will enable employees exposed to workplace chemicals to more quickly obtain and to more easily understand information about the hazards associated with those chemicals. OSHA estimates that the revised Hazard Communication Standard will result in prevention of 43 fatalities and 585 injuries and illnesses annually.

[In the next issue: HCS 6 - "The Safety Data Sheet Has Replaced the MSDS"]