

SAFETY-BLINDED TO SAFETY-MINDED, OSHA TO IMPLEMENT NEW STANDARDS IN CHEMICAL HANDLING



To ensure a consistent and universal approach to categorize chemicals and communicating their hazard levels and to address the constant danger of exposure to hazardous chemicals by US workers, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration has modified its Hazard Communication Standard, aligning it with the United Nations' Globally Harmonized System of chemical classification and labeling. OSHA on its website has stated that once implemented, the new standards will improve the quality and consistency of hazard information in the workplace. Not only will it lessen workplace injuries by facilitating training and providing an understanding of everything to the safe handling of hazardous chemicals. (OSHA) says its new Hazardous Communications Standard will have an effect on over 40 million workers and five million workplaces. "Exposure to hazardous chemicals is one of the most serious threats facing American workers today," said U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis. "Revising OSHA's Hazard Communication standard will improve the quality and consistency of hazard information, making it safer for workers to do their jobs and easier for employers to stay competitive." The major changes that the revised standards have from the former one are that users have to provide specific criteria for classification of health and physical hazards, as well as classification of mixtures. Chemical manufacturers and importers must provide a hazard statement along with 16-section format safety-data sheet. Information regarding precautionary measures to be taken is an imperative and perhaps, the most crucial change, employers are required to train workers on how to handle the chemicals appropriately. A change that could make a noteworthy impact has been made for people who cannot read English, normally the language in which the safety precautions are written. Companies will now have to use warning symbols, called pictograms that will convey the hazard information to the workers. According to OSHA, the new safety standards will benefit the industry in a number of ways. Prime amongst this is that it is expected to reduce the number of accidents, fatalities and injuries, associated with working with dangerous chemicals. It is presumed that the new standards will result in the prevention of 43 fatal accidents and 585 injuries or illnesses. Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Dr. David Michaels, whilst explaining the difference between the existing standards and the revised one said, "OSHA's 1983 Hazard Communication Standard gave workers the right to know, this update will give them the right to understand, as well."

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