

## Hazard Communication Standard: Labels and Pictograms

OSHA has adopted new hazardous chemical labeling requirements as a part of its recent revision of the Hazard Communication Standard, 29 CFR 1910.1200 (HCS), bringing it into alignment with the United Nations' Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS). These changes will help ensure improved quality and consistency in the classification and labeling of all chemicals, and will also enhance worker comprehension. As a result, workers will have better information available on the safe handling and use of hazardous chemicals, thereby allowing them to avoid injuries and illnesses related to exposures to hazardous chemicals.

The revised HCS changes the existing Hazard Communication Standard (HCS/HazCom 1994<sup>1</sup>) from a performance-based standard to one that has more structured requirements for the labeling of chemicals. The revised standard requires that information about chemical hazards be conveyed on labels using quick visual notations to alert the user, providing immediate recognition of the hazards. Labels must also provide instructions on how to handle the chemical so that chemical users are informed about how to protect themselves.

The label provides information to the workers on the specific hazardous chemical. While labels provide important information for anyone who handles, uses, stores, and transports hazardous chemicals, they are limited by design in the amount of information they can provide. Safety Data Sheets (SDSs), which must accompany hazardous chemicals, are the more complete resource for details regarding hazardous chemicals. The revised

standard also requires the use of a 16-section safety data sheet format, which provides detailed information regarding the chemical. There is a separate [OSHA Brief on SDSs](#) that provides information on the new SDS requirements.

All hazardous chemicals shipped after June 1, 2015, must be labeled with specified elements including pictograms, signal words and hazard and precautionary statements. However, manufacturers, importers, and distributors may start using the new labeling system in the revised HCS before the June 1, 2015 effective date if they so choose. Until the June 1, 2015 effective date, manufacturers, importers and distributors may maintain compliance with the requirements of HazCom 1994 or the revised standard. Distributors may continue to ship containers labeled by manufacturers or importers (but not by the distributor themselves) in compliance with the HazCom 1994 until December 1, 2015.

This document is designed to inform chemical receivers, chemical purchasers, and trainers about the label requirements. It explains the new labeling elements, identifies what goes on a label, and describes what pictograms are and how to use them.

### Label Requirements

Labels, as defined in the HCS, are an appropriate group of written, printed or graphic informational elements concerning a hazardous chemical that are affixed to, printed on, or attached to the immediate container of a hazardous chemical, or to the outside packaging.

The HCS requires chemical manufacturers, importers, or distributors to ensure that each container of hazardous chemicals leaving the workplace is labeled, tagged or marked with the following information: product identifier; signal word; hazard statement(s); precautionary

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the 2012 update, the Hazard Communication Standard had last been amended in 1994. 'HazCom 1994' refers to the version of the Hazard Communication Standard in effect directly prior to the 2012 revision, printed in the 1995 through 2011 versions of the Code of Federal Regulations. It is also available on OSHA's webpage.

above, the label could state, "Do not breathe vapors or spray. Get medical attention if you feel unwell. Dispose of contents in accordance with local/regional/national/international regulations." See Examples 1 and 2A of this document as an example.

In most cases, the precautionary statements are independent. However, OSHA does allow flexibility for applying precautionary statements to the label, such as combining statements, using an order of precedence or eliminating an inappropriate statement.

Precautionary statements may be combined on the label to save on space and improve readability. For example, "Keep away from heat, spark and open flames," "Store in a well-ventilated place," and "Keep cool" may be combined to read: "Keep away from heat, sparks and open flames and store in a cool, well-ventilated place." Where a chemical is classified for a number of hazards and the precautionary statements are similar, the most stringent statements must be included on the label. In this case, the chemical manufacturer, importer, or distributor may impose an order of precedence where phrases concerning response require rapid action to ensure the health and safety of the exposed person. In the self-reactive hazard category Types C, D, E or F, three of the four precautionary statements for prevention are:

- "Keep away from heat/sparks/open flame/hot surfaces. - No Smoking.";
- "Keep/Store away from clothing/.../combustible materials";
- "Keep only in original container."

These three precautionary statements could be combined to read: "Keep in original container and away from heat, open flames, combustible materials and hot surfaces. - No Smoking."

Finally, a manufacturer or importer may eliminate a precautionary statement if

it can demonstrate that the statement is inappropriate.

- **Supplementary Information.** The label producer may provide additional instructions or information that it deems helpful. It may also list any hazards not otherwise classified under this portion of the label. This section must also identify the percentage of ingredient(s) of unknown acute toxicity when it is present in a concentration of  $\geq 1\%$  (and the classification is not based on testing the mixture as a whole). If an employer decides to include additional information regarding the chemical that is above and beyond what the standard requires, it may list this information under what is considered "supplementary information." There is also no required format for how a workplace label must look and no particular format an employer has to use; however, it cannot contradict or detract from the required information.

An example of an item that may be considered supplementary is the personal protective equipment (PPE) pictogram indicating what workers handling the chemical may need to wear to protect themselves. For example, the Hazardous Materials Identification System (HMIS) pictogram of a person wearing goggles may be listed. Other supplementary information may include directions of use, expiration date, or fill date, all of which may provide additional information specific to the process in which the chemical is used.

- Pictograms are graphic symbols used to communicate specific information about the hazards of a chemical. On hazardous chemicals being shipped or transported from a manufacturer, importer or distributor, the required pictograms consist of a red square frame set at a point with a black hazard symbol on a white background, sufficiently wide to be clearly visible. A square red frame set at a point without a hazard symbol is not a pictogram and is not permitted on the label.

The pictograms OSHA has adopted improve worker safety and health, conform with the GHS, and are used worldwide.

label from the chemical manufacturer or, the product identifier and words, pictures, symbols or a combination thereof, which in combination with other information immediately available to employees, provide specific information regarding the hazards of the chemicals.

If an employer has an in-plant or workplace system of labeling that meets the requirements of HazCom 1994, the employer may continue to use this system in the workplace as long as this system, in conjunction with other information immediately available to the employees, provides the employees with the information on all of the health and physical hazards of the hazardous chemical. This workplace labeling system may include signs, placards, process sheets, batch tickets, operating procedures, or other such written materials to identify hazardous chemicals. Any of these labeling methods or a combination thereof may be used instead of a label from the manufacturer, importer or distributor as long as the employees have immediate access to all of the information about the hazards of the chemical. Workplace labels must be in English. Other languages may be added to the label if applicable.

If the employer chooses to use the pictograms that appear in Appendix C on the workplace (or in-plant) labels, these pictograms may have a black border, rather than a red border.

Employers may use additional instructional symbols that are not included in OSHA's HCS pictograms on the workplace labels. An example of an instructional pictogram is a person with goggles, denoting that goggles must be worn while handling the given chemical. Including both types of pictograms on workplace labels is acceptable. The same is true if the employer wants to list environmental pictograms or PPE pictograms from the HMIS to identify protective measures for those handling the chemical.

Employers may continue to use rating systems such as National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) diamonds or HMIS requirements for workplace labels as long as they are consistent with the requirements of the Hazard Communication Standard and the employees have immediate access to the specific hazard

information as discussed above. An employer using NFPA or HMIS labeling must, through training, ensure that its employees are fully aware of the hazards of the chemicals used.

If an employer transfers hazardous chemicals from a labeled container to a portable container that is only intended for immediate use by the employee who performs the transfer, no labels are required for the portable container.

### **Sample Labels**

The following examples demonstrate how a manufacturer or importer may display the appropriate information on the label. As mentioned above, once the manufacturer determines the classification of the chemical (class and category of each hazard) using Appendices A and B, it would determine the required pictograms, signal words, hazard statements, and precautionary statements using Appendix C. The final step is to put the information on the label.

The examples below show what a sample label might look like under the revised HCS requirements. The examples break the labeling out into "steps" to show the order of information gathering and how label creation occurs. Step 1 is performing classification; step 2 is gathering full label information; and step 3 is creating the label.

These examples are for informational purposes only and are not meant to represent the only labels manufacturers, importers and distributors may create for these hazards.