

ALERT: Canada and US Agree to Cooperate on GHS Implementation



Canada previously announced its intention to adopt the UN's Globally Harmonized System (GHS), an international system for classifying and labelling chemicals. The plan is to align with the US, which has already taken steps to implement GHS.

In furtherance of that plan, Health Canada's Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety Branch (HECS) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) just signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), paving the way for collaboration on GHS implementation.

'Today we live and work in a global environment with varying and sometimes conflicting national and international requirements. Through GHS and now this MOU, OSHA and Health Canada have forged a relationship to jointly provide concise information to protect those exposed to hazardous chemicals,' says OSHA Administrator Dr. David Michaels.

Under the MOU, which was signed by Michaels and Suzy McDonald, director general, Workplace Hazardous Materials Directorate, HECS, both countries will 'establish a working group to reduce systematic barriers between the systems responsible for occupational safety and health of workplace chemicals and collaborate to reach common positions for the United Nations Subcommittee of Experts on the GHS about proposed updates to the system, among other goals,' according to an OSHA news release.

Health Canada hasn't issued its own news release on the MOU yet. We'll let you know when it does and what it has to say.

The most recent timeline on GHS implementation from Health Canada:

- Spring 2013: Canada will table amendments to the *Hazardous Products Act*
- *Spring 2014: Changes* to the HPA and its regulations, as well as other affected pieces of legislation, are finalized
- June 2015: Provinces and territories will have amended their corresponding OHS laws.

A transition period is expected, but you should still start preparing for GHS now. For example, you may start seeing some GHS-compliant safety data sheets (SDSs'the GHS version of MSDSs) and GHS-compliant labels on hazardous substances you get from suppliers in the US and other jurisdictions that have already adopted GHS, including the EU. So start giving basic GHS training to workers now.

Read this special report on GHS for an overview of the system, how it will impact WHMIS and what steps you can take now to prepare for the implementation of GHS.

The OHS Insider's WHMIS/GHS Compliance Centre has many resources on GHS, including:

- The 'Globally Harmonized System' and What It Means to You
- 8 Things to Do Now to Prepare for the GHS
- Recorded Webinar: The Implementation of GHS in the US and Canada
- Recorded Webinar: How GHS Will Change WHMIS.