

WHMIS: Making the Transition from MSDS to SDS



'How the heck am I supposed to get an updated SDS when the supplier of the chemical hasn't even created the darned thing yet'

When I got this frantic note from an OHSI user, it occurred to me that people are still confused about the WHMIS/GHS transition, especially with regard to MSDS SDS. So let's see if we can't clear things up.

SHORT ANSWER

First of all, I want to reassure the user (and anybody else wondering the same thing) that you won't need a new SDS until December 1, 2018. From now thru November 30, 2018, you'll be okay with *either* a GHS Safety Data Sheet (SDS) *or* an old school WHMIS Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS).

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Important changes to WHMIS MSDS rules are taking effect and you need to be on top of the new rules and when they kick in.

ORIGINAL WHMIS MSDS RULES

Here are the WHMIS MSDS rules that have been around since 1988:

- Rule 1: Employers must ensure that each chemical listed in the regulations as a 'controlled product' that they bring in for workplace use has an up to date and accurate MSDS.
- Rule 2: Suppliers of controlled products must furnish such an MSDS when they first ship the product and an updated version after changes affecting the product and information on the original MSDS change.
- Rule 3: Rather than prepare the MSDS themselves, the vast majority of employers get the document from their suppliers.
- Rule 4: If the supplier doesn't provide the MSDS with the shipment (or it finds that the MSDS it currently has is out of date), the employer must request one as soon as possible.

- Rule 5: The employer is allowed to store (but not use) the controlled product for a specified amount of time, typically 3 to 6 months, as long as it makes reasonable efforts to seek the MSDS from the supplier.

NEW GHS SDS RULES

The GHS rules with regard to employer duties. All that's really changing is that the MSDS is morphing into the SDS, and 'controlled products' (click [here](#) to find out about the format and information differences between MSDS and SDS) are being renamed 'hazardous products.' The following mark-up illustrates how it all plays out:

- Rule 1: Employers must ensure that each chemical listed in the regulations as a '~~hazardous~~controlled product' that they bring in for workplace use has an up to date and accurate MSDS.
- Rule 2: Suppliers of ~~hazardous~~controlled products must furnish such an MSDS when they first ship the product and an updated version after changes affecting the product and information on the original MSDS change.
- Rule 3: Rather than prepare the MSDS themselves, the vast majority of employers **will** get the document from their suppliers.
- Rule 4: If the supplier doesn't provide the MSDS with the shipment (or it finds that the MSDS it currently has is out of date), the employer must request one as soon as possible.
- Rule 5: The employer is allowed to store (but not use) the ~~hazardous~~controlled product for a specified amount of time, typically 3 to 6 months, as long as it makes reasonable efforts to seek the MSDS from the supplier.

PRACTICAL IMPACT

Under GHS, you'll need to do what you currently do now but instead of an MSDS, you'll need to get an SDS from your suppliers.

TRANSITION FROM MSDS TO SDS

But as with other GHS changes, transitioning from MSDS to SDS will take time. So, while the GHS rules officially took effect in 2015, they don't become binding until 2018. In the interim, compliance with either MSDS or SDS requirements will suffice.

Here's where things get a bit tricky. The official deadline for *suppliers* to comply with GHS rules is Sept. 1, 2018. However, many suppliers are planning (or have already made) to make the transition ahead of the official compliance deadline. Result: From now thru August 31, 2018, you may receive either an MSDS or SDS from your supplier. But come Sept. 1, 2018, you should accept an SDS and only an SDS from your suppliers.

Meanwhile, you'll have to oversee the transition of your own MSDS binders and access systems:

- From now thru Nov. 30, 2018: Your binders and systems can contain either all MSDSs, all SDSs or some of each: but
- On Dec. 1, 2018, your binders and systems must contain only SDSs.