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OSHA revises its hazard communication standard

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Recently, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) announced changes to its Hazard Communication Standard (HAZCOM).

The revised standard is intended to align HAZCOM with the United Nations' Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS).

The revisions are scheduled to be fully implemented in 2016. During the transition period to the effective completion dates noted in the standard, chemical manufacturers, importers, distributors, and employers may comply with either 29 CFR §1910.1200 (the final revised standard), the current HAZCOM standard, or both.

The cost to businesses of the revised rule is estimated by OSHA to be some \$201 million annually. The major annual costs associated with the final rule include:

- \$22.5 million for the classification of chemical hazards in accordance with the GHS criteria and the corresponding revisions to material safety data sheets and labels to meet new format and content requirements;
- \$95.4 million for the training for employees to become familiar with new warning symbols and the revised material safety data sheet format;
- \$59 million for management familiarization and other management-related costs as may be necessary to implement the changes; and
- \$24.1 million for the costs to purchase upgrad-

ed label printing equipment and supplies or to purchase pre-printed color labels in order to include the hazard warning pictogram enclosed in a red-bordered diamond on the product label.

OSHA estimates that the benefits to workers by reducing confusion about chemical hazards in the workplace, facilitating safety training, and improving understanding of hazards, especially for low literacy workers, outweighs the costs associated with implementation of the revised standard.

In fact, OSHA contends that the revisions, once implemented, will prevent an estimated 43 deaths and result in an estimated \$475.2 million in enhanced productivity for businesses each year.

According to OSHA, the revised standard also is expected to prevent an estimated 585 injuries and illnesses annually.

Finally, OSHA states in its press release that the revised standard "will reduce trade barriers and result in estimated annualized benefits in productivity improvements for American businesses that regularly handle, store, and use hazardous chemicals, as well as cost savings of \$32.2 million for American businesses that periodically update safety data sheets and labels for chemicals covered under the standard."

Further information for workers, employers, and downstream users of hazardous chemicals can be reviewed at OSHA's Hazard Communication Safety and Health topics at <http://www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/index.html>, which includes links to OSHA's revised Hazard Communication Standard and guidance materials such as Q and A's, OSHA fact sheet, and Quick Card. ▲

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