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**COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE TRANSPORT OF
DANGEROUS GOODS AND ON THE GLOBALLY
HARMONIZED SYSTEM OF CLASSIFICATION
AND LABELLING OF CHEMICALS**

Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally
Harmonized System of Classification
and Labelling of Chemicals

Fourteenth session
Geneva, 12-14 December 2007
Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GHS

Addressing issues relating to the implementation of the GHS in member countries

Transmitted by the experts from Australia, Canada, South Africa, Thailand, the United Kingdom,
the United States of America and the World Health Organization^{*/}

A. Background

1. At its 13th session, the Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling (GHS Sub-Committee) welcomed a proposal from the expert from Australia that an official document on implementation issues related to the GHS be brought back for the consideration of the Sub-Committee at the 14th meeting in December 2007.

2. That proposal arose from discussions in the Sub-Committee of two information documents submitted by Australia (UN/SCEGHS/13/INF.14) and South Africa (UN/SCEGHS/13/INF.10). Each of these documents raised issues of consistency in approaches to GHS implementation, including the transition arrangements being put in place by countries that are changing existing national systems for chemicals management, the provision of training

^{*/} In accordance with the programme of work of the Sub-Committee for 2007-2008 approved by the Committee at its third session (refer to ST/SG/AC.10/C.4/24, Annex 2 and ST/SG/AC.10/34, para. 14) (GHS implementation).

programs, the application and understanding of the 'building block approach' in different sectors and deviations from the GHS classification scheme as the system is implemented in different countries and regions.

3. The information documents also raised the issue of what role the Sub-Committee might play in providing a mechanism for exchange of information on GHS implementation, and/or as a source of advice on implementation issues for members. It was considered to be important for the Sub-Committee to be involved in work that could maximize the benefits of the implementation of the GHS, particularly as it relates to the enhancement of protection of human health and the environment, and the facilitation of international trade in chemicals.

4. The Sub-Committee's function, as described in paragraph 1.1.3.2.1 of the GHS document, includes the following responsibilities:

- (a) To act as custodian of the GHS, managing and giving direction to the harmonization process...;
- (c) To promote understanding and use of the GHS and to encourage feedback;
- (d) To make the GHS available for worldwide use and application;
- (e) To make guidance available on the application of the GHS.

On the basis of these functions, this document proposes a way forward for the Sub-Committee to play an enhanced role in addressing implementation issues for the GHS.

5. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) recently conducted surveys of developed and developing countries, respectively, asking questions on the scope and progress of GHS implementation, and seeking information on how the GHS was being implemented in various countries. The results of these surveys, reported in July 2007 in information documents UN/SCEGHS/13/INF.3 and UN/SCEGHS/13/INF.13, are an important source of information on how GHS has been, or might be, implemented in various countries.

6. In addition, a number of countries and/or regions (such as New Zealand and the European Union) have either implemented or developed detailed plans to implement the GHS to some extent across most or all sectors, with clear legislative instruments and proposals available for other members of the Sub-Committee to peruse. Information is available on the transition arrangements (or proposed transition arrangements) for these countries, including timeframes for implementation, labelling and other information requirements, and the scope of the GHS implementation and variations (if any) between different sectors in those countries.

B. Proposal

7. A range of countries are in the process of reviewing and/or revising their chemicals management frameworks, using some or all of the GHS classification and hazard communication elements. In a number of cases, this process is further advanced in some sectors than in others and in some countries than in others. As a result, implementation processes and transition arrangements are likely to be highly variable. Further complicating this issue, not all sectors

in all countries are represented on delegations to the GHS Sub-Committee, and not all delegations are necessarily familiar with the GHS implementation issues being addressed by sectors other than their own.

8. The GHS document is now in its 2nd revised edition. As there are not likely to be large amounts of significant technical changes to the document in the immediate future, the document provides a stable platform for countries to use as the basis for implementation of the GHS. Thus the focus of the Sub-Committee is likely to be on implementation issues, probably for the remainder of the current biennium and possibly into the next biennium.

9. The GHS has the potential to deliver a range of significant benefits to stakeholders involved in national and/or global chemicals management. The largest impediment to realization of the potential of the GHS is likely to be inconsistent or highly variable implementation of the system across different countries, coupled with a lack of guidance on implementation or insufficient communication of GHS implementation issues between the various countries. The Sub-Committee has great potential to address implementation issues and assist countries in implementing the GHS in a useful and consistent manner.

10. To facilitate a more useful and targeted exchange of information relating to GHS implementation, it is proposed that a working group on GHS implementation be formed. This group could meet or exchange information by email or internet between GHS Sub-Committee sessions, and/or meet face-to-face in the margins of GHS Sub-Committee or other international meetings.

11. As well as providing a mechanism for a general exchange of information, this group might also provide a focus on specific issues faced by specific sectors and allow the sharing of information from experiences or issues on GHS implementation in areas, for example, dealing with consumer chemicals, pesticides, or workplace chemicals.

12. Issues such as those identified in the informal papers at the thirteenth session of the Sub-Committee might provide a source of topics that could be discussed initially, with the outcome of those discussions brought back to the Sub-Committee on a regular basis. These might include transition arrangements (e.g. would countries continue to accept old classifications and labels as well as GHS classification and labels for prescribed periods?), training (e.g. would there be information available that might assist in training of staff in the GHS that can be used by a variety of countries?), and building block approaches (e.g. would countries all adopt the elements of the GHS in a relatively consistent manner across sectors?).

13. A draft 'terms of reference' for this proposed group will be provided as an information document and can be finalised in discussions at the Sub-Committee, subject to the agreement of the Sub-Committee on the need for such a group on GHS implementation.
