



## Transitioning to Globally-harmonized WHMIS: An Overview

### What is WHMIS?

Canada's Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, commonly known as WHMIS, is designed to provide workers with information about hazardous products used, stored, handled or disposed of in the workplace.

This system is mandated by federal, provincial and territorial law. The main purpose of federal WHMIS legislation is to require suppliers of hazardous products

to provide health and safety information as a condition of sale. Provincial legislation establishes employer duties to obtain this information and ensure workers have access and understand it.

In Ontario, WHMIS applies to all workplaces covered by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)* along with federally regulated workplaces governed by the *Canada Labour Code (the Code)*.

### Has Globally-harmonized WHMIS altered the delivery of this information?

Changes to federal WHMIS-related law, and supporting provincial and territorial regulation, came into full effect on December 1, 2018 altering the way this critical information is delivered. These changes involved the incorporation of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) into existing WHMIS here in Canada.

The purpose of GHS WHMIS is to standardize, on a global scale, the hazardous product classification and communication system. Examples of changes include:

- ◆ new hazard classification rules and hazard classes,
- ◆ pictograms replacing hazard symbols,
- ◆ safety data sheets (SDSs) replacing MSDSs,
- ◆ new content requirements on hazardous product labels,
- ◆ new SDS and label updating requirements, and as a result of these changes,
- ◆ **new training requirements** (see pg 2).

### Hazard Classes/Pictograms

The new GHS WHMIS consists of more than 30 specific hazard classes divided into three hazard groups:

- ◆ **physical** (i.e., flammability, reactivity and asphyxiation),
- ◆ **health** (i.e., eye and skin irritation, reproductive toxicity and carcinogenicity), and
- ◆ **environmental** (i.e., hazard to aquatic life and ozone layer).\*

\* GHS introduced an environmental hazard group and an explosive class that are not adopted by new WHMIS law. Still, suppliers and workplaces have the option of including relevant information on labels and SDSs (see pg 2).

Each hazard class is represented by one or more of the 10 pictograms (formerly known as WHMIS hazard symbols of which there were eight). Each pictogram acts as a visual alert to a particular safety, health and/or environmental hazard associated with a specific product. They must be diamond shaped with red borders except for one that is a black circle representing biohazardous infectious materials (previous WHMIS hazard symbols were circle shaped).



### Supplier/Workplace Labels

Similar to original WHMIS requirements, under GHS WHMIS the **supplier** of a hazardous product must still provide **labels** in english and french. Employers must still ensure they are affixed to the product/container. Required elements on a supplier label include:

- **product name,**
- **hazard pictograms,**
- **signal word** (danger or warning),
- **hazard statements,**
- **precautionary statements,\***
- **supplier name and contact information,** and
- **supplemental hazard information.**

\*The original WHMIS required a first aid section on the supplier label. This information is now required under precautionary statements.

The pictogram(s), signal word and hazard statements must be grouped together.

The employer must ensure a **workplace label** is produced and affixed to a product/container if:

- ✓ **a hazardous product is produced and used in the workplace,**
- ✓ **a hazardous product is transferred into a container, or**
- ✓ **a supplier label becomes lost or unreadable.**

Specific content requirements for workplace labels fall under provincial or territorial legislation or the *Canada Labour Code* (for federally regulated workplaces).

### Safety Data Sheets (SDSs)

The original WHMIS material safety data sheet (MSDS) required nine information categories. The new **safety data sheet** (SDS) adds additional information requirements in a standard 16 section format, including fire-fighting measures. Also new are sections for ecological information, disposal considerations, transport information and regulatory information. Suppliers, however, can opt to not provide information under these last four headers.

The supplier of a hazardous product must provide SDSs in both english and french.

Employers must ensure SDSs are readily available to workers and members of a joint health and safety committee or worker representative. They must be updated when significant new data becomes available.

## How do employers comply with WHMIS training requirements?

Ontario employers covered by the *OHSA* or *the Code* are legally required to provide workers with general and workplace-specific WHMIS training. This training must cover all elements of GHS WHMIS and must result in the workers being able to use the information to protect their health and safety [s. 7(3), *WHMIS Reg.*]. This training must be developed and implemented in consultation with the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative.

Furthermore, the workplace WHMIS program, including continued confirmation of worker knowledge, must be reviewed at least once a year or when a new hazardous product enters the workplace or new information about a hazardous product becomes available. This must be done in consultation with the JHSC or health and safety representative.