

## FOREWORD

1. The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) is the culmination of more than a decade of work. There were many individuals involved, from a multitude of countries, international organizations, and stakeholder organizations. Their work spanned a wide range of expertise, from toxicology to fire protection, and ultimately required extensive goodwill and the willingness to compromise, in order to achieve this system.

2. The work began with the premise that existing systems should be harmonized in order to develop a single, globally harmonized system to address classification of chemicals, labels, and safety data sheets. This was not a totally novel concept since harmonization of classification and labelling was already largely in place for physical hazards and acute toxicity in the transport sector, based on the work of the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods. Harmonization had not been achieved in the workplace or consumer sectors, however, and transport requirements in countries were often not harmonized with those of other sectors.

3. The international mandate that provided the impetus for completing this work was adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), as reflected in Agenda 21, para.19.27:

*"A globally harmonized hazard classification and compatible labelling system, including material safety data sheets and easily understandable symbols, should be available, if feasible, by the year 2000".*

4. The work was coordinated and managed under the auspices of the Interorganization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) Coordinating Group for the Harmonization of Chemical Classification Systems (CG/HCCS). The technical focal points for completing the work were the International Labour Organization (ILO); the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods.

5. Once completed in 2001, the work was transmitted by the IOMC to the new United Nations Economic and Social Council's Sub-Committee of Experts on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS Sub-Committee). The Sub-Committee was established by Council resolution 1999/65 of 26 October 1999 as a subsidiary body of the former Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, which was reconfigured and renamed on the same occasion "Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals" (hereafter referred to as "the Committee"). The Committee and its sub-committees work on a biennial basis. Secretariat services are provided by the Sustainable Transport Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

6. The GHS Sub-Committee is responsible for maintaining the GHS, promoting its implementation and providing additional guidance as needs arise, while maintaining stability in the system to encourage its adoption. Under its auspices, the document is regularly revised and updated to reflect national, regional and international experiences in implementing its requirements into national, regional and international laws, as well as the experiences of those doing the classification and labelling.

7. The first task of the GHS Sub-Committee was to make the GHS available for worldwide use and application. The first version of the document, which was intended to serve as the initial basis for the global implementation of the system, was approved by the Committee at its first session (11-13 December 2002) and published in 2003 under the symbol ST/SG/AC.10/30. Since then, the secretariat has been updating and preparing consolidated revised editions of the GHS every two years, following the decisions taken by the Committee.

8. At its eighth session (9 December 2016), the Committee adopted a set of amendments to the sixth revised edition of the GHS which include, inter alia, revised criteria for categorisation of flammable gases within Category 1; miscellaneous amendments intended to clarify the definitions of some health hazard classes; additional guidance to extend the coverage of section 14 of the Safety Data Sheets to all bulk cargoes transported under instruments of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), regardless of their physical state; revised and further rationalized precautionary statements in Annex 3; and a new example in Annex 7 addressing labelling of small packagings with fold-out labels. The seventh revised edition of the GHS takes account of these amendments which were circulated as document ST/SG/AC.10/44/Add.3.

9. While Governments, regional institutions and international organizations are the primary audiences for the GHS, it also contains sufficient context and guidance for those in industry who will ultimately be implementing the national requirements which are adopted. Availability of information about chemicals, their hazards, and ways to protect people, will provide the foundation for national programmes for the safe management of chemicals. Widespread management

of chemicals in countries around the world will lead to safer conditions for the global population and the environment, while allowing the benefits of chemical use to continue. Harmonization will also have benefits in terms of facilitating international trade, by promoting greater consistency in the national requirements for chemical hazard classification and communication that companies engaged in international trade must meet.

10. In paragraph 23 (c) of its Plan of Implementation adopted in Johannesburg on 4 September 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) encouraged countries to implement the GHS as soon as possible with a view to having the system fully operational by 2008. Subsequently, the United Nations Economic and Social Council invited Governments that had not yet done so, to take the necessary steps, through appropriate national procedures and/or legislation, to implement the GHS as recommended in the WSSD Plan of Implementation<sup>1</sup>. It also reiterated its invitation to the regional commissions, United Nations programmes, specialized agencies and other organizations concerned, to promote the implementation of the GHS and, where relevant, to amend their international legal instruments addressing transport safety, workplace safety, consumer protection or the protection of the environment so as to give effect to the GHS through such instruments. Information about the status of implementation may be found on the UNECE Sustainable Transport Division website<sup>2</sup>.

11. Additional information on the work of the Committee and its two sub-committees, as well as corrigenda (if any) which may be issued after publication of this document, can be found on the UNECE Sustainable Transport Division website<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolutions 2003/64 of 25 July 2003, 2005/53 of 27 July 2005, 2007/6 of 23 July 2007, 2009/19 of 29 July 2009, 2011/25 of 27 July 2011, 2013/25 of 25 July 2013 and 2015/7 of 8 June 2015.

<sup>2</sup> [www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/implementation\\_e.html](http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/implementation_e.html).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unece.org/trans/welcome.html> and [www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs\\_welcome\\_e.html](http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_welcome_e.html).

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