

**Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods
and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification
and Labelling of Chemicals**

23 June 2021

**Sub-Committee of Experts on the
Transport of Dangerous Goods**

Fifty-eighth session

Geneva, 28 June-2 July 2021

Item 10 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Issues relating to the Globally Harmonized System
of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals:
miscellaneous**

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

fortieth session

Geneva, 5-7 July 2020

Item 2 (i) of the provisional agenda

**Work on the Globally Harmonized System (GHS):
Other matters**

Proposal for simple definition for the word “toxic”

**Transmitted by the Responsible Packaging Management Association of
Southern Africa (RPMASA)**

Background

1. As an outcome of discussions on toxic by inhalation and packagings in the TDG Sub-Committee during the last biennium, it became apparent that there is no simple definition for the word “Toxic” in Chapter 1.2 of either the Model Regulations or the GHS.
2. The definition for acute toxicity refers to serious adverse health effects from a short-term oral, dermal or inhalation exposure to a substance or mixture. There are detailed criteria to define and to differentiate between the different categories for toxic by ingestion, dermal and inhalation routes.
3. Acute toxicity Category 1 and 2 are both defined as fatal, with Category 3 defined as toxic and Category 4 as harmful, yet there is no definition for the word Toxic itself.
4. We find, particularly in developing countries that the word toxic is frequently used, especially related to chemicals, and misconstrued as causing death, thus it would be helpful to have a simple globally recognised and harmonized definition for the word Toxic, in order to clarify that toxic is not necessarily fatal, as shown in the acute toxicity criteria where toxic is only used for Category 3.
5. We have consulted and reviewed many documents and databases for appropriate definitions. Many describe acute toxicity definitions, criteria and degree of toxicity, and others refer one to Toxic waste, but few address the word Toxic. *Most agree that toxic is not fatal. Definitions include:
 - **European Commission website, Green facts:** Able to poison or harm the body/ an organism. **Toxic** substances can cause adverse health effects.
 - **Oxford dictionary:** Very harmful or unpleasant in a pervasive or insidious way, Toxic is something poisonous, or something very harmful or bad.
 - Harmful, hazardous, noxious, dangerous, destructive, injurious
 - Capable of causing injury or death, especially by chemical means; poisonous.
 - **Cambridge dictionary:** very unpleasant or unacceptable, *causing a lot of harm or unhappiness,

- **Macmillandictionary.com:** poisonous and harmful to people or things; causing serious problems. Something poisonous, or something very harmful or bad – to health or *mental health.
- **NY Health website:** A toxic substance is a substance that can be poisonous or cause health effects.
- **Wikipedia:** Toxicity is the degree to which a chemical substance or a particular mixture of substances can damage an organism.

6. *Toxic is also used in the context of relationships, where it is used to mean harmful or destructive, but not fatal!

7. We invite the sub-committees to consider the benefit of having a simple definition of the word “toxic”, and to consider a simple definition e.g.:

“Toxic means a substance or mixture which is unpleasant, noxious and has the ability to cause [serious] harm, damage or adverse effects to a person, animal, plant or other organisms under specific circumstances.”
