



Global Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the Globally Harmonised System for Chemical Classification and Labelling (GHS)

A WSSD Type II Partnership

May 2003

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The recently completed *Globally Harmonised System for Chemical Classification and Labelling* (GHS) represents a unique opportunity to protect the environment and human health from the harmful effects of chemicals. The system provides a comprehensive approach to chemical hazard communication (communicating the risks of chemical substances through the use of labels and Safety Data Sheets) and provides guidance for classifying chemicals according to agreed characteristics (e.g. flammability, different types of toxicity, carcinogenicity, etc.).

The GHS is a basic “building block” of sound chemicals management: it can help ensure that chemicals in use are properly labelled with hazard symbols and statements that all users can recognize and understand. With this tool in-hand, those who use chemicals can make appropriate decisions to protect human health and the environment.

Both the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) have set a GHS implementation goal of 2008. Developing countries and countries with economies in transition have indicated that capacity building and training to assist with national implementation of the system is necessary, according to their own identified priorities and needs.

CHEMICAL HAZARD COMMUNICATION: A PRIORITY IN DEVELOPING AND TRANSITION COUNTRIES

In developing countries and countries with economies in transition, chemical hazard communication has emerged as a top priority for sound chemicals management. In a recent survey undertaken by UNITAR:

- seventy percent of countries reported that labelling difficulties, mislabelling, or lack of comprehension of hazard communication elements had caused human or environmental health problems;
- about half of the countries stated that hazardous chemicals were not adequately labelled or that safety data sheets were not available, as appropriate;
- only forty percent of countries reported that *existing* labels or safety data sheets for hazardous chemicals were easily comprehensible;
- about two-thirds of countries indicated that awareness of the GHS was low or non-existent in their country; and
- two-thirds of the countries indicated that undertaking capacity building activities on chemical hazard communication was a high priority.

Consistent with these results, 66 countries formally indicated to UNITAR their interest in capacity development support related to GHS implementation, including support for national-level capacity building projects.

THE UNITAR/ILO/OECD PARTNERSHIP

In response to this interest, and building upon the existing UNITAR/ILO GHS Capacity Building Programme,¹ UNITAR, ILO and OECD launched a WSSD Partnership on capacity building for GHS implementation. The main goal of the Partnership is to mobilize resources and catalyze partnerships for concrete activities at the global, regional and national levels to strengthen capacities in developing countries and countries in transition towards effective implementation of the GHS.

The Partnership, which was announced at the Johannesburg Summit in August, 2002 will focus on GHS capacity building activities related to chemicals used in the agriculture, consumers, industrial and transport sectors. The Partnership pursues concrete objectives and targets for implementing GHS capacity building activities at the global, regional and national levels and Partners work together to mobilize relevant resources to reach these targets.

Core partnership activities are technically reviewed by the Programme Advisory Group (PAG) of the UNITAR/ILO GHS Programme. However, not all core Partnership activities need necessarily to be executed by UNITAR/ILO. Countries and organizations may also execute core Partnership activities independently, if the activity contributes to one of the Partnership targets and is coordinated through the PAG. The joint oversight and secretariat function for the Partnership will be provided by UNITAR, working together with ILO and OECD, and in collaboration with other contributing Partners.²

PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

Specific objectives of the Partnership include:

- to implement GHS awareness raising activities at the regional and national levels, including development of train-the-trainer strategies;
- to assist preparation of regional and national GHS-related situation analyses and capacity needs assessments both at the regional and national levels;
- to develop capacity building guidance and training materials on important aspects of GHS strategy development and implementation; and
- to provide feedback to the ECOSOC Sub-committee of Experts on the GHS (SCEGHS), the CSD, the IOMC, and the IFCS on issues relevant to GHS capacity building and identify needs for additional guidance materials.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Significant resources are required to ensure that the Partnership will reach its stated goal and objectives, at least during early stages of Partnership activities. Given the tangible benefits to human health, the environment and international trade that implementation of the GHS can provide, the costs of GHS capacity building activities can be considered well worth the investment. Countries and organizations that are interested in contributing to the Partnership are encouraged to contact the following:

Senior Programme Coordinator Training and Capacity Building Programmes in Chemicals and Waste Management UNITAR Palais des Nations CH-1211 GENEVE 10, Switzerland FAX +41 22 917 80 47 Email: gpghs@unitar.org

¹ A brochure outlining this Programme, initiated in 2001, is available from UNITAR.

² It is expected that overall governance of the Partnership will be further discussed at the July 2003 meetings of the PAG and the Partners.