



Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety

Partnership for Global Chemical Safety

*Development of a Global Capacity Building Programme
to Assist Countries in Implementing the GHS*

R O O M D O C U M E N T

Development of a Global Capacity Building Programme to Assist Countries in Implementing the GHS

Information Note

Prepared by UNITAR and ILO

July 2000

This document is made available as a background document for the Forum plenary discussion on the Globally Harmonized Chemical Classification and Labeling System (GHS). The document will be further developed in the future and UNITAR and ILO welcome comments and suggestions by Forum III participants on the ideas proposed.

Introduction

1. One of the key factors which will determine ultimately the success of the GHS world-wide is the extent to which countries will both recognize the potential benefits of the GHS and develop the necessary infrastructures to implement and operate the system at the national level. This recognition will be of particular importance to the developing countries and countries with economies in transition which did not take a direct part in the technical work of harmonization.
2. By the end of 2001, the technical work leading to a GHS Guidance Document will be completed and transmitted to the UN ECOSOC Sub-Committee on the GHS. It is likely that it will take several years for the GHS to achieve universal use. The UN, the IOMC organizations and the IFCS are therefore expected to play a key role in encouraging and assisting member States in the process of adoption and implementation of the GHS. The elaboration of appropriate mechanisms and strategies designed to bring interested countries at an operational level need therefore to be started as soon as possible.

Basis for a Capacity Building Strategy

3. Recognizing the complexity and magnitude of the task and the number of potential countries requiring support, the needed global strategy must be developed as a long-term if not permanent mechanism, preferably within the framework of a Global GHS Capacity Building Programme (GCBP). The Programme should comprise a level of flexibility which can accommodate different situations and needs in different countries and therefore contain a variety of assistance activities with different objectives and involve different target groups.
4. Establishment of the proposed GCBP should build upon the work catalyzed by the IFCS carried out

by UNITAR/IOMC in promoting national chemical safety coordination structures through the development of National Chemical Management Profiles and Integrated National Programmes for the Sound Management of Chemicals. Delivery of the Programme elements could be provided through the joint efforts of ILO and UNITAR working in close collaboration with other IOMC organizations. A significant level of financial resources will be required for running such a programme over the next 5 years.

Elements of a Global GHS Capacity Building Strategy

Global and regional awareness raising

5. At present, awareness of, and knowledge about, the GHS in developing countries and countries with economies in transition is limited to the countries and organizations involved in the work carried out by the Focal Points, namely ILO, the UN CETDG and the OECD. Global and regional IFCS meetings, as well as regional meetings on chemicals management organized by IOMC Organizations are also used to provide information about the GHS. However, this approach is not systematic or even properly coordinated in terms of the messages to be conveyed. Furthermore, the information provided is limited to the technical aspects of the GHS and very little is done about information on its potential benefits, impact, and challenges concerning the implementation process, particularly in the less developed countries.

6. A series of awareness raising activities should therefore be carried out at international, regional, and sub-regional levels to reach a maximum of countries in a short time and to maximize on the impact of the GHS adoption. This should be done through existing fora and planned conferences such as Forum III, Rio +10 in 2002, CSD and ECOSOC meetings, and Forum IV. Regional or sub-regional actions should be channeled through frameworks such as Mercosur, ASEAN, SADC, etc. This global awareness raising phase would set the stage for and facilitate the initiation of country-based activities.

Country-based GHS implementation programmes

7. The real challenges and bottlenecks related to GHS implementation will need to be addressed at the national level. Significant changes, e.g. in the area of legislation, may be required and a variety of affected and interested parties will need to be involved to ensure effective implementation of the GHS. For example, due to the comprehensive nature of the GHS, several key ministries, i.e. Labor, Environment, Health, Agriculture, Industry and Transport, will need to be involved in the national GHS implementation process. Equally important is the involvement of parties outside of government, such as industry, labor and public interest groups which have a stake or interest in chemical management issues. The creation of national chemical management coordination structures will therefore be of crucial importance in establishing an operational capacity for the GHS. As one of the key partners in such co-ordinating structures, national chemical industry associations hold a major responsibility to catalyze action at the company level to implement the GHS.

8. Taking into consideration the need for stakeholder co-operation in implementing the GHS at the national level, it is proposed to make use of national co-ordinating committees which have already been established in many countries through the preparation of National Chemical Management Profiles, as called for by the IFCS. These mechanisms could provide useful points of entry to catalyze national GHS awareness raising activities and to initiate the development of co-ordinated National GHS Action Plans. At the same time, National Profiles can provide a good starting point for conducting an assessment of countries' national legal, institutional, administrative and technical infrastructure related to GHS implementation. Some seventy seven countries have already prepared a comprehensive National Profile through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Proposed Steps of a National GHS Implementation Programme

9. Recognizing that the full implementation of the GHS in less developed countries will be a long-term undertaking, the following three-step strategy is proposed for countries to take systematic action towards GHS implementation. A possible time line for implementation is provided in the Annex.

Step I: National Awareness Raising and Preparatory Activities

10. The objective of Step I would be to facilitate a better understanding among all interested and affected parties at the national level about opportunities and challenges related to country-level GHS implementation and to set the stage for developing a National GHS Action Plan. Country-based awareness raising workshops would set the basis for inter alia:

- establishment of a multi-sectoral GHS task force for interagency coordination;
- assessment of existing legal, institutional, administrative and technical infrastructures related to the GHS (based on National Chemicals Management Profiles, if available); and
- initiating a process for developing a National GHS Action Plan and organization of a National GHS capacity building programme

Step II: Development of a National GHS Action Plan

11. This Phase would involve a national policy dialogue with the objective to reach agreement and prepare a policy document (the National GHS Action Plan) outlining key decisions to be made (e.g. revision of legislation), activities to be implemented (e.g. technical training), proposed time lines and resource requirements associated with the future implementation and operation of the GHS at the national level. The National GHS Action Plan would address, inter alia, the following questions/issues:

- C how will the GHS be introduced into the national legal system, e.g. through amending existing sectoral legislation, development of new legislation, etc.?
- C what is the division of responsibility between different government agencies and what is the role of industry, labor groups, etc. in making the GHS work? Do universities have a potential role to play, e.g. in the area of education and training?
- C which additional measures and activities are required to ensure that the GHS has an effective impact on the area of hazard communication?
- C what are the resource implications/needs for introducing the GHS in terms of both human and financial resources? Which resources are nationally available and what external assistance is required?
- C through which mechanism will the co-ordination of various GHS-related activities be ensured?; and
- C etc.

Completion of Step 1 and Step 2 activities are expected to take about one to two years per country, depending on available resources

12. If well prepared, the National GHS Action Plan (which would essentially be the result of multi-stakeholder strategy formulation exercises) can become a powerful tool to mobilize national, as well as external, resources for medium- and long-term implementation activities.

Step III: National Implementation and Operation of the GHS

13. The objective of Phase III would be to implement key decisions and organize activities as outlined in the National GHS Action Plan with the long-term goal to ensure comprehensive implementation of the GHS at the national level. In implementing these decisions, industry holds a major responsibility and is expected to be at the forefront of GHS implementation. While some actions may be undertaken within a short time frame, such as the establishment of a national GHS co-ordination forum/committee, other activities will be more long-term in nature, such as the development of a complementary hazard communication system and the training of all workers handling dangerous chemicals.

Development of Guidance and Training Materials

14. Based on the results of awareness raising activities and GHS implementation requirements, the IOMC organizations, under the umbrella of the UN SC/GHS would develop self-teaching training modules, preferably computer-based and multi-lingual, for the implementation of the GHS. In addition to technical guidance documents concerning the GHS, development of the following documents/training materials, for example, should be considered:

- a brochure describing the GHS and its potential benefits, aimed at national decision-makers (proposed working title: *The GHS: An Opportunity for Countries to Protect Human Health and Environment Through Classification and Labeling of Dangerous Chemicals*);
- a *Guidance Note/Checklist to Conduct an Assessment of the National GHS-Related Legal, Institutional, Administrative and Technical Infrastructure*;
- a *Guidance Document to Assist Countries in Developing a National GHS Action Plan*; and
- computer- and/or internet-based training modules on self-classification using the GHS Guidance document.

Getting Started in a Practical Way - Initiation of Pilot Projects

15. In order to take advantage of the time prior to formal adoption of the GHS by ECOSOC, two to three countries should be identified in 2000/2001 which are interested in, and committed to, develop a National GHS Action Plan through involvement of affected and interested parties. These pilot projects could provide an important testing ground to review draft-versions of GHS-related guidance and training material and provide important feedback to the international community on opportunities and challenges associated with GHS implementation in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

Resource Issues

16. The international community must recognize that the introduction and implementation of the GHS in developing countries and countries with economies in transition is likely to require a significant amount of external assistance, at least during the early phases of introducing the system. However, in the light of the potential benefits of the GHS in terms of protecting human health and the environment and in facilitating the free trade of chemicals, the costs of GHS capacity building activities should be considered well worth the investment.

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Annex 1 - Global GHS Capacity Building Strategy (Draft 1)

Tasks/Activities	2000		2001		2002		2003		
	Jan-June	July-Dec	Jan-June	July-Dec	Jan-June	July-Dec	Jan-June	July-Dec	
Development and Implementation of the GHS at the Global Level									
Technical work in IOMC Co-ordinating Group	—————								
Development of GHS technical guidance document		—————							
ECOSOC adopts the GHS					—————				
Global and Regional Awareness Raising on the GHS									
Utilisation of existing fora/activities to raise awareness about the GHS		—————							
Country-based GHS Capacity Building Projects									
Identification of pilot countries		—————							
Initiation, implementation and evaluation of National GHS Action Plan pilot project				—————					
Initiation of additional national GHS capacity building projects							—————		
Development of Supporting Capacity Building Documents and Training Materials									
Development of GHS awareness raising brochure	—————								
Development and testing of GHS guidance note/checklist for country assessment of GHS-related infrastructure		—————							
Development and testing of National GHS Action Plan guidance document			—————						
Development and testing of GHS technical training manual					—————				