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NEW RULES FOR CATEGORISING, LABELLING AND PACKAGING OF SUBSTANCES

There is European legislation for the categorisation, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures. Anyone working with chemical products is affected by this legislation. You may find new sentences and symbols on the packaging of a cleaning agent.

Why does your trusted cleaning agent suddenly have a symbol on the label? And what does the symbol of an exclamation mark mean?



This Technical Bulletin will help you to improve your understanding of the new legislation.

The new rules

The European Commission has published a new regulation concerning the categorisation, labelling and packaging of chemical substances and mixtures (EC No. 1272/2008). A regulation means that the rules are the same in all European member states. The business community refers to the regulation as the CLP regulation and the Dutch government calls it EU-GHS. The regulation came into effect on 20 January 2009. The new categorisation and labelling aspects were introduced gradually from that moment.



Substances must comply to these new regulations from 1 December 2010 and mixtures from 1 June 2015. Until this time the current Substances and Preparations Directive will still apply.

Why implement a new system?

EU-GHS is the European realisation of an agreement by world leaders to create a global, harmonised system for the categorisation and labelling of chemical substances and mixtures.

For example, in the past product X might have been labelled as toxic in the United States, while Europe labelled it hazardous and the Chinese considered the product to be harmless.

For countries without a categorisation system, GHS will provide a vast improvement in safety, health and the environment. The implementation of unambiguous symbols and standard sentences will also facilitate global training of employees.

The importance of hazard categorisation

The label of a cleaning agent can list warning symbols and warning sentences. This information allows the user to gauge the danger of the undiluted product at a glance. He then knows what, if any, precautions need to be taken to work safely with the product. A well-known example is the black St Andrew's cross on an orange background, for example on descaler. In combination with the warning sentence 'Irritating to the skin', the symbol indicates that contact with the skin should be avoided. This hazard information warns about a danger, not a risk (refer to intermezzo).

The information on the label tells you how to work safely with the product.

Intermezzo: Risk = exposure x danger

A cleaning agent can contain hazardous substances. This does not necessarily mean that you are at risk. Whether you are at risk depends on the exposure.

In other words, whether or not you come into contact with the hazard. And your risk is a combination of the chance that you are exposed to the hazard and the possible consequences. Whether you feel safe or unsafe depends on:

- your estimation of (the severity of) the hazard;
- your estimation of the chance that you will be in danger;
- whether you can take measures against exposure to the danger.

If you work with a cleaning agent with a dispensing system, you do not have to come into contact with the undiluted liquid. Your risk is then very small. And if you follow the advised safety precautions for a product, use of that product is safe.

Preparation for EU-GHS

Many manufacturers of cleaning agents have already started with preparing their internal information systems for EU-GHS. This is necessary to process the reclassification of hazard categories for substances and mixtures. This will allow them to produce new labels and safety information sheets for cleaning agents in the future. You, the end users, will also have to modify your systems to process the new information. The manufacturers will inform their clients in a timely manner, so that they can adjust their training and work place instructions as soon as this becomes necessary.

What will change as a result of EU-GHS?

If the composition of a product does not change, it is logical that the characteristics do not change either. However, you should take into account that products that are currently classified as non-hazardous may soon carry a warning label. This is because EU-GHS is introducing changes:

- For example, the limits for flammability will change, meaning that more products will have a flammable symbol.
- The current 15 hazard categories will be replaced by 9 hazard categories, but these will consist of several subcategories. In practice you will be dealing with more categories for hazards, for example the category flammable solid substances.
- 9 new pictograms instead of the current 7.
- Abnormal P, H and EUH sentences will replace the R and S sentences.
- The use of signal words 'danger' and 'warning' on the label.
- Preparations will be referred to as mixtures in EU-GHS.

Safe cleaning

Those who are committed to safe cleaning will look beyond the symbols on a product label. A sound approach consists of several steps.

1. Look at the label. Is there any danger (according to symbols and sentences)?
2. Read the safety information sheet of the work place instruction card. Have personal protective measures been prescribed?
3. Clean according to the instructions.
4. Wash and dry your hands thoroughly afterwards.

Standing strong together

Environmentally friendly cleaning? We can do it together! The government provides laws and legislation and sees to the implementation thereof. Manufacturers critically evaluate the composition of the products and the packaging. The branch organisation ensures the exchange of knowledge and information. And you as a user? Make a conscious choice about how you clean. The environment is affected most during the cleaning process. And you can change that.

Make a conscious choice

- Use a cleaning agent consistent with the contamination.
- Read the safety information sheet.
- Make a clear work place instruction.
- Always apply the prescribed safety measures.
- Follow the instructions on the label.
- Use each product 100%.
- Do not release undiluted leftover product into the environment.
- Recycle as much packaging as possible.

Current pictogram	New pictogram
 Explosive	 Explosive
 Oxidising	 Oxidising
 (very) highly flammable	 Flammable
 Harmful	 Irritating, sensitising, harmful
 Corrosive	 Corrosive
 Toxic	 Toxic
 Environmental hazardous	 Hazardous to the aquatic environment
	 Pressurised gasses
	 Long-term health hazard

Finally

The hazard information applies to the product as it is in the packaging. This does not take into account that you will always dilute a certain product before use. The law also does not take into account the chance of exposure to the relevant substances. Therefore, the label is not conclusive about the risk.