

Warning labels on household products to change

Consumers will notice changes from now through to 2017

The familiar chemical warning labels on many household products will be changing over the coming years as part of a United Nations sponsored programme to harmonise the symbols and precautionary statements used on the labels on a global basis. These labels are commonly found on a wide range of products, from dishwasher tablets, bleach and lime scale removers in the kitchen, to DIY products such as paints, varnishes and adhesives, and garden chemicals. They alert consumers to the hazards associated with chemicals in the products to enable appropriate care to be taken when using them.

The design of the new symbols comprises a white diamond with red borders containing a black pictogram. Some of the new symbols are similar to the previous versions and are easily recognised, but several are new. To help consumers familiarise themselves with the new labels, the Chemical Hazards Communication Society (CHCS) has created a handy guide which can be downloaded from a specially created website at <http://www.understandthelabel.org.uk>.

Stuart Longworth, Chairman of the CHCS, commented, “The regulations governing the new labels are an essential part of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS). They will make life easier for consumers when they travel and businesses when they import and export products because there will eventually only be one set of symbols to deal with throughout most of the world.”

In order to give consumers and industry time to adapt to this new system, manufacturers will be able to continue using the “old” warning labels over a transitional period. The timing of the switch depends on whether the chemical is a pure substance or a component in a mixture. Substances had to be classified, labelled and packaged in conformance with the new regulations by 1st December 2010, although substances already on the shelves on that date can continue to be supplied until 1st December 2012. The corresponding dates for mixtures are 1st June 2015 and 1st June 2017.

--- Ends (325 words) ---



Notes to Editors:

The Chemical Hazards Communication Society

This information has been provided by the Chemical Hazards Communication Society (CHCS). The CHCS is a not for profit organisation dedicated to promoting the awareness of chemical hazards and improvements in their identification and communication by providing information and training to companies that market chemical products. More information is available on the CHCS website at <http://www.chcs.org.uk>.

The CHCS has also created a Facebook page and a Twitter feed. Useful information will be posted on these as the harmonisation programme continues.

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/UnderstandTheLabel>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/labelmeanings>

Background to the new regulations

1. A Eurobarometer survey published in May 2011 (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_360_en.pdf) highlighted the poor level of understanding of the current symbols and how to use chemicals safely amongst consumers.
2. The new chemical labelling regulations fall under Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on Classification, Labelling and Packaging of Substances and Mixtures, commonly known as CLP. CLP is replacing the Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 2009, commonly known as CHIP4.
3. CLP introduces the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) into Europe. More information about the GHS can be found on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) website at http://live.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_welcome_e.html.
4. Graphics files for the new pictograms can be downloaded free of charge from the UNECE website at <http://live.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/pictograms.html>. The pictograms are available in gif, eps and tiff formats. The symbols to be used for CLP are the diamonds with the red border and black symbol. The other pictograms on this web page are used for the transport of dangerous goods.

Editorial Contact:

Steve Gunn, steve.gunn@stevegunn.co.uk, Tel: 01844-297667, Mob: 07764-621527.