

Chemicals: classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures

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The Commission presented a report on the safe use of chemicals.

1) Framework in force and purpose of the report: Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 (**CLP Regulation**) is the European Union's regulation regarding the classification, labelling and packaging of chemical substances and mixtures. It aligns previous EU legislation on classification, labelling and packaging of chemicals to the **GHS** (Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals). The first version of the GHS was approved in 2002 and is updated every two years. GHS is a United Nations system to identify the hazards of chemicals and to inform users about these hazards through standard symbols (pictograms) and phrases on the packaging labels and through safety data sheets (SDS).

According to the CLP Regulation, communication of hazards⁴ of chemicals in the form of labelling is the main way to inform the general public on the safe use of chemicals. In particular, the CLP hazard label encompasses the following elements:

- the hazard pictogram, intended as a graphical composition that includes a symbol plus other graphic element in order to convey specific information on the hazard concerned;
- the signal word that indicates the relative level of severity of hazards to alert the reader to a potential hazard (i.e. Warning, Danger);
- the precautionary statement that describes recommended measures to minimise or prevent adverse effects resulting from exposure to a hazardous substance or mixture due to its use or disposal;
- the hazard statement that defines the nature of the hazards of a hazardous substance or mixture, including, where appropriate, the degree of hazard.

In accordance with the CLP Regulation, the **European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)** carried out a study to evaluate the communication on information to the general public on the safe use of substances and mixtures and the potential need for additional information on the label. The study was based on two main elements:

- **a Eurobarometer opinion poll conducted in 2010**, which surveyed the perceptions of European citizens towards the label comprehension and understanding of related hazard pictograms;
- **an additional qualitative study conducted in 2011** - by a team of European academics with expertise in risk perception, research and analysis - in order to provide further elements on public perceptions and individual behavioural patterns.

On 20 January 2012, ECHA has transmitted the report on the "Study on the Communication on Safe Use of Chemicals to the General Public" to the Commission⁵. This Report summarises the main findings of the study, compares them to other similar reports provided by internationally recognized organisations (UN, UNITAR, etc.) and draws conclusions on whether an amendment of the CLP Regulation is justified or not.

2) The Commission's recommendations: in the light of the findings of ECHA's study, **changes to the CLP pictograms themselves are not recommended.** The Commission considers that it is more beneficial to allow the public to get used to the new global system, steadily improving the overall understanding of the hazards posed by chemicals and encouraging a safer use of household chemicals in particular.

As the Commission considers that, at this point in time a legislative proposal to amend the CLP Regulation is not justified, it recommends that:

- **awareness raising activities** should be prepared and conducted to enhance safe use of chemicals by EU citizens coordinated/promoted by the ECHA's risk communication and helpdesk networks – preferably in the run-up to the deadline as of which the CLP labelling obligations will apply to chemical mixtures (1 June 2015);
- manufacturers and importers could be encouraged to **bring product appearance and packaging more in line with the hazard information on labels;**
- **contents simplification and layout improvement on substance and mixture labels should be promoted** (for instance, providing further guidance on omitting certain information elements and on precedence rules);
- a further analysis of the understanding of the safe use of substances and mixtures is conducted some time **after 1 June 2015** (also, hazard and precautionary statements should be considered).