

In 2015, the Globally Harmonized System (GHS) was adopted for classifying and labelling hazardous products in the workplace.

The program is still known as WHMIS, but to differentiate between the “old” WHMIS and the “new” WHMIS, they are now called WHMIS 1988 and WHMIS 2015.

There is a long transition period for compliance, ending December 1, 2018. Suppliers have already started using the new formats for labels and Safety Data Sheets, and if your organization is receiving the new information, then workers need to be trained in both systems. (Hint: Check a supplier label. If it has a black solid border instead of a cross-hatched border, it's in the new format.)

Here's a brief run down on the key changes:

WHMIS 1988 had 6 classes of controlled substances (one of those was divided into three divisions). Under WHMIS 2015, there are 21 classes of hazardous products, divided between physical hazards and health hazards. Some of these are further divided into categories or types.

The technical product document under WHMIS 1988 was known as a Material Safety Data Sheet. In WHMIS 2015, that is shortened to just Safety Data Sheet, and there are 16 required headings, all of which must be in the same order. Under the old version, there only had to be 9 headings, and there was no consistency to their placement.

With the improvements in classification and in information provided on the Safety Data Sheet, WHMIS 2015 will provide even more information to workers to help them understand how to work safely with hazardous products in the workplace.

