



INTER-ORGANIZATION PROGRAMME FOR THE SOUND MANAGEMENT OF CHEMICALS
A cooperative agreement among UNEP, ILO, FAO, WHO, UNIDO, UNITAR and OECD

Press Release

PROTECTING PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CHEMICAL CLASSIFICATION AND LABELLING

From: United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) jointly with OECD and ILO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Johannesburg, South Africa, 29 August 2002 – Communicating the hazards of dangerous chemicals to workers and the public is one of the key foundations for protecting human health and the environment in modern developing societies. Yet, in a great number of countries, dangerous chemicals are produced, imported and used without warning signals and phrases indicating their hazard. As a result, states the Executive Director of the Environmental Council of Zambia James Phiri, “many chemicals which otherwise could be used safely are poisoning workers, contaminating the environment, including water supplies and sanitation systems, or threatening the health of disadvantaged groups such as women and children”. As a major break-through in this area, the Globally Harmonized System for Chemical Classification and Labelling (GHS) is expected to be approved by the UN Economic and Social Council in early 2003, following more than a decade of technical work and negotiations after the Rio Summit in 1992, led by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Committee for the Transport of Dangerous Goods (UNCTDG). The GHS has the ultimate goal of ensuring that information on chemical hazards (such as labels and safety data sheets) is made available to workers and consumers in a harmonized and understandable format in countries around the world.

In light of many requests and documented needs for training and capacity building for chemical hazard communication and GHS implementation, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) together with ILO and OECD have initiated a WSSD “type 2” *Global Partnership for Capacity Building to Implement the GHS*. According to Mr. Marcel Boisard, UNITAR Executive Director and Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, “the main goal of the Partnership will be to strengthen capacities at all levels and sectors – in particular in developing countries – to ensure a higher degree of chemical labelling and related precautionary measures for industrial chemicals, agricultural chemicals, chemicals in transport and consumer chemicals”. Boisard adds, “the Partnership is expected to lead in the medium- and long-term to a decrease in environmental and human health related effects attributable to the use of hazardous chemicals”.

The WSSD “type 2” GHS Partnership is directly linked to a negotiated outcome of the WSSD Plan of Action which “encourages countries to implement the new globally harmonized system (GHS) for the classification and labeling of chemicals as soon as possible with a view to having the system fully operational by 2008”. To reach this goal, the Partnership will catalyse inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral co-operation both at the international level and in participating partner countries. According to Swiss State Secretary for the Environment Phillipe Roch, “the Partnership specifically seeks – beyond government support – the broader involvement of and contributions from concerned industries, corporate associations and concerned non-governmental organizations in international and national efforts to implement the GHS”.

Initial partnership activities have received financial support from the Government of Switzerland and the Government of the Netherlands through UNITAR/ILO executed country projects in South Africa, Sri Lanka, Senegal, and Zambia who selected chemical hazard communication and GHS implementation as a priority topic. UNITAR, ILO and OECD invite and encourage other governments and major groups, in particular industry, to join the Partnership and support core activities of the partnerships in order to initiative expeditious action towards reaching the WSSD 2008 target and, more importantly, to protect people and environment from potentially dangerous chemicals.

At the Summit, the Partnership will be introduced at the following two occasions:

1. Partnership Announcement, Friday 30 August, 16:00-16:30, Sandton Conference Center (please check daily bulletin for possible change of time).
2. Presentation by UNITAR’s Executive Director in the parallel event “The Role of the Chemical Industry in Capacity Building in the Safe Management of Chemicals: Working Towards Stronger Partnerships”, 30 August 2002, 12:30-15:30, Hilton Hotel. The event is sponsored by the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA).

For matters relating to the WSSD partnership announcement, please contact Achim Halpaap at 072 391 3218.

For further information about the UNITAR/ILO GHS Capacity Programme, please contact:

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Or visit the UNITAR booth at the Ubuntu Village where additional written material on the Partnership can be obtained.