

New chemical warning signs are set for international understanding

The Responsible Packaging Management Association of South Africa (RPMASA) has noted with concern that many industry and retail businesses are not aware of the new globally accepted warning signs for hazardous chemicals that must be displayed on their products, packaging and transport vehicles.



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South African businesses that do not switch to the new hazardous chemical warning symbols may lose international trade opportunities due to noncompliance with global packaging regulations

"The old European Union danger symbols used to communicate various hazard related information were square in shape with an orange background. The new Global Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) pictograms create a single, universally recognisable warning sign that anyone in any country will understand immediately," said Liz Anderson, Executive Director at RPMASA.

RPMASA is especially concerned about small businesses that do not have capacity for a packaging, labelling and Safety Data Sheet (SDS) compliance expert. "Small exporters are vulnerable to loss of business if their products are labelled incorrectly. Use of outdated warning symbols and SDS should not become a barrier to trade and these challenges can be resolved easily if businesses are informed," said Anderson.

Products such as pool chemicals, aerosols, personal products, paints and household cleaning materials are some of the items that contain chemical components, which need to be classified according to one of the nine Transport classes as well as the new GHS categories.

A business may be held financially responsible for any chemical accident, should their products not comply with the GHS system and not display the new warning symbols.

RPMASA have set up a 24 Hour Call Centre hosted by TrenStar, and Toll free number that companies can refer to on their product SDS, packaging, labelling and transport vehicles. This is available to members and non-members, to reduce the financial and human resource burden for companies. The SDS for each product is uploaded and updated seamlessly onto the cloud-based REACH Delivery UK system which is accessed by the Call Centre, and provides up-to-date product and transport information. The REACH Delivery system produces a receipt for the uploaded SDS, which is then used as proof of compliance.

The new warning symbols, which will replace all current retail ones, have a red diamond border with a white background and black symbol (see comparison below). Note that major changes are for retail as the transport diamonds will not change for larger packaging that does not require an outer pack.

However, where health hazards apply, the GHS red diamond pictograms, eg harmful / irritant / toxic and carcinogens will supplement these transport warning diamonds. "Even though these changes seem rather small, and most of the symbols inside the borders are the same, it is so important for businesses to be certain that they comply with the new standards and GHS red diamonds to protect themselves from potential liability and financial loss," concluded Anderson.

Old warning symbols	New warning symbols
	
Explosive	Explosive and self-reactive
	
Flammable gas	Compressed gas
	
Flammable	Flammable
	
Oxidiser	Oxidiser
	
Very toxic	Acute toxicity
	
Corrosive	Corrosive
	
Environmental hazards	Environmental hazards
	
Irritant	Harmful / Irritant
	
Harmful	Respiratory sensitizer / Toxic / Carcinogen

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