Position Paper

The Implementation of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals and Labelling of Crop Protection products

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Crop Protection Product labels are the primary communication tool to farmers for the safe and effective handling of crop protection products. It is essential that labels convey a clear message on health and safety aspects of product use. CropLife International, through its member associations and leading companies, has worked extensively with regulatory authorities to develop product labels that are consistent with national regulatory decisions. Additionally, CropLife International has collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to ensure that product labels, particularly those used in developing countries, are consistent, clear and applicable to local use.

CropLife International recognises that the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) provides new opportunities for a rational approach to harmonise labelling, primarily, of industrial chemicals, on a global basis.

Application of GHS to crop protection products needs to be addressed by governments in a manner that does not undermine the extensive assessment process through which such products are already regulated and labelled. This would ensure that both the hazards and risks to the environment and human health are evaluated and the relevant information is communicated appropriately on the product label.

Introduction

GHS has a history going back as far as 1990 when the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted a Convention and Recommendations on Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work[1]. Adoption of this Convention required a country to have a system for hazard classification and labelling. Following substantial review of existing national systems by the UN Committee of Experts (CoE) for the Transportation of Dangerous Goods and the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals and subsequent endorsement by the UN Conference on the Environment and Development, Rio 1992, the CoE adopted the GHS in December 2002 with a desired implementation at the national level by 2008. By August 2012 the implementation process is still ongoing and primarily affecting industrial chemicals rather than crop protection products.

Crop Protection Products (CPPs)

The benefits of using CPPs are part of a global, sustainable agricultural movement for the future; and the safe use of CPPs is a high priority of the entire plant science industry. CropLife International and its member associations work with governments worldwide as well as intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) to ensure that users of CPPs are trained and educated in the correct handling and use of such products.

CPPs are extensively tested and, in most countries, strictly regulated product labels carry a wealth of information on the intrinsic hazards of the product and the potential risk to human health and the environment.

Hazard classification systems, such as the World Health Organisation's Classification Scheme for pesticides[2], combined with risk and precautionary statements on product labels, provide advice to users on operator safety. This advice ranges from mixing and loading operations to requirements for application procedures and techniques and to practices necessary for environmental protection.

Testing and Evaluation

CPPs are tested for toxicity to humans and the environment, using internationally accepted test guidelines such as those of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development[3]. For the assessment of CPPs, the applicable hazard categories of GHS should be put into context with the risk assessment carried out as part of the registration process for CPPs, i.e. the dose causing a hazardous effect should be compared with potential or actual exposure.

Test results are normally used to classify the product according to GHS. However, similar products can be classified by extrapolation from test results for a particular product provided there are no significant differences in the type of ingredients.

Inert ingredients in the pesticide formulation are evaluated through testing of the formulated product, through expert judgment, and by conducting a risk assessment.

Recommendations

Insofar as governments contemplate implementation of GHS for labelling of CPPs, CropLife International believes that the following considerations should be taken into account:

1. The implementation of GHS allows a designated national authority to use discretion and a building-block approach to decide which GHS elements will be implemented on a national basis.

2. CropLife International strongly encourages all governments to work with their appropriate pesticide regulatory authorities to ensure that only those elements appropriate to CPPs are selected. This is necessary to ensure that the product label conveys consistent messages.

3. In order to ensure the safe use of products, labels should continue to carry the appropriate procedures for managing the potential risks to the users, as has already been done prior to the advent of GHS.

4. The work of FAO and the crop protection industry on product labelling and the use of specific pictograms in developing countries should be preserved and be consistent with the overall aims of the 2002 revised version (published by the FAO) of the *International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides*[4].

5. When, as a result of implementation of GHS, classification changes are proposed for a product label, the regulatory authority should consider the benefits of making such changes against the potential confusion to the user of the product caused by these changes. In other words, an impact assessment considering the risks and benefits of adopting the changes should be carried out.

6. In any case, when classification changes are recommended and introduced, appropriate communication needs to be made to all product users and adequate transition periods allowed for orderly implementation.

7. Where test data are available, they should always be used to determine classification, in preference to values extrapolated from other sources.

8. FAO Specifications should be used to determine similarity of products before extrapolating classification criteria from one product to another. When considering similar products, the general GHS rules on extrapolation using comparable data should be followed.

9. CropLife recommends that self-classification by the CPP supplier be considered when implementing GHS (see box below)

10. Governments should work closely with neighbouring countries to ensure consistency in assessments so as not to impede the recognised and regulated trade in CPPs.

11. When assessing a CPP, regulatory authorities should respect the intellectual property rights of data submitters to the data they have provided in support of classification and labelling.

12. CropLife International encourages the development of appropriate capacity at a national level to achieve classification and labelling based on sound science and rigorous evaluation of reliable data.

13. When GHS is implemented, a smooth transition is called for to avoid market disruption.

Self-classification means that CPP suppliers are responsible for defining and implementing the correct classification and the authorities' role is to ensure that CPP suppliers fulfill their responsibilities. Specifically this means that a CPP supplier is not required to seek approval for each classification prior to use but that they must be able to demonstrate compliance to their authorities on when requested. This ensures the most efficient implementation of GHS by allowing authorities to concentrate on their enforcement role whilst ensuring that the responsibility for correct classification lies clearly on the CPP supplier.

Conclusion

CropLife International has a long history of working constructively with regulatory authorities and IGOs on the assessment of CPPs and the safety of their uses.

CropLife international believes strongly that such processes should be based on science and actual risk in order to ensure continuous improvements in the protection of human health and the environment.

Governments are encouraged to work together when considering classification and labelling to foster international harmonisation and thus avoid potential barriers to trade.

GHS provides opportunities to harmonise classification and labelling of chemicals and thus facilitates international trade in chemicals. The benefits for the crop protection products are less straight forward considering the extensive existing regulatory requirements.

CropLife, therefore, urges governments to make as much use as possible of the flexibility provided by the GHS' building block approach in order to avoid confusing users with contradictory messages concerning the safety to human health and the environment when using CPPs.

References:

[1] Convention concerning Safety in use of Chemicals at Work. International Labor Organisation; Convention C170, Geneva 1990.
Website: http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C170

[2] The WHO Recommended Classification of Pesticides by Hazard and Guidelines to Classification. IPCS, Geneva 2009
Website: http://www.who.int/ipcs/publications/pesticides_hazard_2009.pdf

[3] OECD Guidelines for Testing of Chemicals. Full list of test guidelines. Paris March 2006.
Website: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/9/11/33663321.pdf

[4] International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides (Revised version). Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Rome 2002.
Website:
http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/agphome/documents/Pests_Pesticides/Code/code.pdf

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