

Transition to WHMIS 2015

Changes to Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) will affect both school staff and students.

The following information is accurate at the time of publication. Use this information for general purposes only. See [Canada's National WHMIS Portal](#) for fact sheets and detailed information.

What Is WHMIS, and Why Is It Changing?

WHMIS is a national hazard communication system that provides information on the safe use of hazardous products in Canadian workplaces.

Canada modified WHMIS in February 2015. Canada was one of several countries that adopted the [Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals \(GHS\)](#). The GHS seeks to provide a consistent worldwide chemical classification and labelling system.

The updated system that aligns with the GHS is called WHMIS 2015, which will replace WHMIS 1988 over the next three years.

During the three-year transition—February 11, 2015 to December 1, 2018—employers will prepare to use WHMIS 2015. During this period, employers must use the appropriate WHMIS system(s) that reflect the classification and labelling of the hazardous products found on their work site.

- If the employer is using products that only comply with WHMIS 1988, the employer can continue to use WHMIS 1988.
- If the employer is using any products that comply with WHMIS 2015, the employer must use WHMIS 2015.
- If the employer is using a product that complies with WHMIS 2015, the employer may apply a work-site label, in accordance with Section 398 of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code that complies with WHMIS 1988 to the product container.
- If the employer uses products that comply with both WHMIS 1988 and WHMIS 2015, the employer must use both systems unless they have chosen the previous option for each product that complies with WHMIS 2015.

See the OHS bulletin [Transition from WHMIS 1988 to WHMIS 2015](#) for details.

Who Is Responsible for What?

In Canada, occupational health and safety is a shared responsibility between the federal government, the provinces and the territories.

Health Canada serves as the coordinator for the governance and administration of WHMIS in Canada. Health Canada also acts as the secretariat for this federal, provincial and territorial government partnership system.

Federal legislation regulates the **suppliers** of hazardous products. The federal government describes the information that suppliers must provide when selling a product.

The ministry of Labour in Alberta is responsible to enforce the Alberta *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act, Regulation and Code* and has an agreement (i.e., a memorandum of understanding) with Health Canada to enforce the federal *Hazardous Products Act* and associated regulations.

Part 29 of the OHS Code contains the requirements for employers and workers and will align with the federal legislation by mid-2016. OHS Code, Part 29, identifies school staff as workers. Students are not considered workers.

Provincial [Occupational Health and Safety Legislation](#) regulate **employers, workers and work sites**. In Alberta, the ministry of Labour:

- describes the information that employers must provide to employees
- establishes the training and education requirements for everyone on the worksite

Employers are required to do everything they reasonably can to protect the health and safety of their workers. For more information on employer responsibilities, see Alberta [Occupational Health and Safety: Employers Responsibilities](#).

The *School Act* states that schools must provide a safe learning environment. Providing WHMIS training in schools helps keep students and staff safe in areas where chemicals are used (e.g., Career and Technology Foundations environments, Career and Technology Studies facilities, science labs and classrooms, and maintenance areas).

What Are the Main Differences Between WHMIS 1988 and WHMIS 2015?

Changes in WHMIS 2015 include:

- new classification criteria and hazard classes
- organization of information on the safety data sheet (SDS), formerly called the material safety data sheet (MSDS)
- new hazard pictograms
- new label requirements for suppliers
- changes to terminology (e.g., controlled products versus hazardous products, new definitions)

	WHMIS 1988	WHMIS 2015
Classification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six hazard classes (A to F) listed in the former <i>Hazardous Products Act</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Products are classified under one or more of the hazard classes (19 physical hazard and 12 health hazard classes). New and more specific classifications introduced with different criteria; therefore, re-classification may be necessary.
Exclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of exclusions per section 395 of OHS Code. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most exclusions remain the same. Manufactured articles are not exempt if they release a chemical during <i>installation</i> and normal conditions of use.
Labelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English and French required. Hatched border. Symbols within a circle. All information on label is found within the hatched border. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be in English and French. No hatched border. New label elements and organization. Updated pictograms (see Appendix A). New signal words. Standardized hazard statements and precautionary statements. Supplier and laboratory supply house products are not exempt from labelling. Labels must be updated if “significant new data” provided by supplier
Data Sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Called material safety data sheet or MSDS. Three-year review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Called safety data sheet or SDS. Must always be current—employer’s responsibility to verify information with supplier. A 90-day window to update “significant new data” provided by supplier to SDS. There are 16 sections on SDS. Biohazardous infectious materials have an additional appendix.

What Are the Key Responsibilities for Suppliers, Employers and Employees?

WHMIS Key Responsibilities	
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and classify their products to determine whether they are subject to WHMIS requirements. Create SDSs. Prepare labels for each hazardous product.
Employers (school authority)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate and train workers on the hazards and safe use of products. Ensure that hazardous products (formerly controlled products) are properly labelled. Prepare workplace labels and safety data sheets (SDSs formerly MSDSs) as necessary. Provide access for workers to up-to-date SDSs and labels.
Employees (school staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in WHMIS education and training programs. Take the necessary steps to protect themselves and their co-workers. Participate in identifying and controlling hazards.

The training provided by the employer must be site-specific and deal with specific products and procedures used in the workplace.

Find more information based on who you are: [supplier](#), [employer](#) or [employee](#).

What Are Important Details Regarding the Transition Period?

There are three phases to implementation, as indicated in the chart below:

Phase	Time Period	Suppliers		Employers
		Manufacturers and Importers	Distributors	
1	February 11, 2015 to May 31, 2017	WHMIS 1988 or 2015	WHMIS 1988 or 2015	WHMIS 1988 and/or 2015
2	June 1, 2017 to May 31, 2018	WHMIS 2015	WHMIS 1988 or 2015	WHMIS 1988 and/or 2015
3	June 1, 2018 to November 30, 2018	WHMIS 2015	WHMIS 2015	WHMIS 1988 and/or 2015
Completion	December 1, 2018	WHMIS 2015	WHMIS 2015	WHMIS 2015

As of December 1, 2018, all hazardous products in the workplace must have a WHMIS 2015 label and SDS.

What Does This Mean for School Staff?

School staff should

- store and use hazardous products safely
- learn expectations of the school authority regarding WHMIS 2015 requirements
- check new products that arrive for WHMIS 2015 labels and SDSs
- ensure there is a current SDS when a product arrives with a new label
- complete WHMIS 2015 training before using products complying with WHMIS 2015
- ensure SDSs remain current with up-to-date supplier information
- introduce students to WHMIS 2015

What Does This Mean for Alberta Programs of Study and Assessments?

There will be no changes to the provincial programs of study. The following documents identify where WHMIS is referenced in current Alberta Career and Technology Studies (CTS) and science programs of study.

- [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System in Career and Technology Studies \(CTS\) Programs of Study](#)
- [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System in Alberta Science Programs of Study](#)

During the transition period, it is recommended that students be familiar with both WHMIS 1988 and WHMIS 2015.

During the transition period, WHMIS 1988 symbols will appear on provincial assessments. Field tests for diploma examinations, however, may use WHMIS 2015 symbols during the transition period.

After December 1, 2018, any WHMIS symbols that appear on provincial assessments will be WHMIS 2015 symbols.

Where Can I Get More Information?

You can find detailed and up-to-date information from the following:

- [Canada's National WHMIS Portal \(WHMIS.org\)](#) describes the labels for workplace chemicals used with WHMIS 2015. You will find links to resources and provincial and territorial information.
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety \(CCOHS\)](#) provides training and education materials, such as free e-courses for workers, and fact sheets.

- CCOHS provides [fact sheets](#) that summarize key requirements of WHMIS 2015, including new criteria for classification (pictograms), requirements for supplier labels and standards for safety data sheets.
- The OHS bulletin [Changes to WHMIS Legislation](#) describes changes to WHMIS legislation that affects employers and workers.
- The OHS bulletin [Transition from WHMIS 1988 to WHMIS 2015](#) explains the process for labelling hazardous materials until 2018.