

March 26, 2003

Keith --

If it's not too late, here is the information on the small business MSDS initiative. It took me awhile because the company we originally worked with has changed hands -- twice. But I tracked them down for an update. They are thrilled with the greater safety that can be achieved via electronic means, and it's good for their business as well.

Here is the info.

The Hazard Communication Standard (HazCom) requires that all small businesses communicate to employees the hazards of the chemicals or products in the workplace. The generally accepted method of providing this information was by giving the employees access to the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS), a document produced by the chemical manufacturer that describes the hazards associated with a product and proper instructions for handling.

The management of MSDS, which are frequently updated and changed by the manufacturer, can be a paperwork nightmare for the small business owner. In 1998, however, the Small Business Coalition, led by the Printing Industries of America and comprised of approximately 30 trade associations representing small businesses, supported HR 4037, which would have required OSHA to accept and support the use of CD-ROM, Internet and other electronic media to manage MSDS. While the legislative session ran out of time, OSHA took the initiative to issue guidance accepting electronic MSDSs as an appropriate alternative to paper copies. These alternatives significantly reduce the paperwork burden on the small business owner and improve the safety level of their employees.

Since the guidance was issued, hundreds of companies that provide electronic and Internet based MSDS management services have entered the market. This has benefited the small business owner through reduced costs for these programs and increased availability to markets and industries that were previously under served. In 2002, OSHA's counterpart in mining, MSHA, also introduced a HazCom standard modeled after the OSHA requirements. The existence of alternative MSDS management methods has greatly benefited the owners of small mines and quarries, which make up 95% of the mining industry in the U.S. With the support of the industry's major trade association, the USSGA, mine owners now have many alternatives to managing the paperwork burden associated with MSDS management, while keeping their employees safe and their costs

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