

Changes to the Classification & Labelling of Styrene

During 2015 a number of changes will take place to both the classification and the labelling of resins containing styrene monomer. This will affect most polyester and vinyl ester resins and gel coats used in the UK composites sector.

Composites UK, fully supports any steps to improve the health, welfare and safety of workers within our industry. There are three separate issues which may affect your business.

Changes to Labelling Standards

The labelling of hazardous goods is due to change to comply with a new globally harmonised system; the CLP (Classification, Labelling, Packaging) system was agreed in 2009 and must be in place by 1st June 2015.

You will see a new design of hazard label for all goods with different pictograms replacing the old orange diamonds as below. The majority of manufacturers supplying resins to the UK market have already implemented these new labels or will do so early in 2015. The details of this regulation can be found under EU 1272/2008.

Old Pictograms



New Pictograms



Reclassification of Styrene Monomer

As a result of a 10 year European study the decision has been made to re-classify styrene as Category 2 reproductive toxicant under ANNEX XV of the European Classification and Labelling (CLP) Directive and as a Category 3 reproductive toxicant under the European Dangerous Substances Directive (DSD). It has also been identified as potentially harmful to hearing. This reclassification will become effective for mixtures such as resins from either the 1st April 2015 or the 1st January 2016 depending on which list they are assigned to. As with the labelling you will find that most suppliers providing resins to the UK market will update their labels and Material Safety Data Sheets early in 2015 to take account of this change. Products containing styrene will carry the following specific risk phrases:

Category 1 for specific target organ toxicity following repeated exposure (STOT RE 1, H372 "Ear organs")

Category 2 for reproductive toxicity (Repr.2, H361d Suspected of damaging the unborn child)

Processors should be aware that:

- This change is not the result of any new evidence; rather it is a re-evaluation of existing, historical epidemiological data.
- This does not demonstrate a causal link between styrene and any repro-toxic effect. The reclassification is a precautionary measure reflecting a lack of sufficient evidence to prove that there is not a problem.

You should also be aware that, as a result of the same study, the European authorities decided that there was no evidence to indicate that styrene has any carcinogenic or mutagenic effects.

Lastly, producers should be clear that the classification relates to styrene in its liquid state and not to cured composite products containing styrene. It has been confirmed that resins and gel coats which were previously approved for food or potable water contact will remain on the approved list (Regulation 1935/2004 & Regulation 10/2011).

New Maximum Exposure Limit for Styrene

As a result of the above study it has been much rumoured that the EU are due to announce a new, pan European MEL for styrene in the workplace. A figure of 23ppm has been suggested but as of December 2014 this figure has not been confirmed and we must wait for details from the HSE including the implementation date and any feed in period. The current MEL for styrene in the workplace in the UK is 100ppm on an 8 hour time weighted average with an agreed industry commitment to endeavour to maintain levels below 50ppm. Current levels in Europe vary from 100 to 10ppm.

These changes are bound to re-ignite interest in the use and control of styrene in the workplace. Composites UK recommends that processors continue to exercise sensible precautions, as recommended in the CEFIC guide or UK HSE Plastics Processing Sheet 14 and comply with all the relevant local regulations regarding the handling and storage of chemical products.

Overall processors should also remember that, compared to last year, the level of risk has not changed and that no new evidence has been discovered.

Further Help & Information

The Composites UK Material Suppliers Sub-Group meets on a quarterly basis. For more information on how to get involved, visit: www.compositesuk.co.uk/industry-support/sub-groups

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