

## Enterprise Resource Planning

by Sean W. O'Donnell

### MSDS Management



The purpose of information technology is to help us do our jobs better. Computerization of the MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet) process demonstrates the benefits of applying advanced technology to business practices. The right computer software will help eliminate the costs of managing non-revenue producing tasks such as MSDS compliance while assuring that your lubricants manufacturing business satisfies government requirements simply, more rapidly, and cost-effectively. In addition, the appropriate software application will satisfy your company's green initiative by eliminating the paper trail of MSDS compliance through utilization of web page access, email, faxing from a digital image, and similar technologies.

Required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Hazard Communication Standard, the MSDS is a form which states that workers have the right to know what dangers are inherent to the chemicals in products they use in the workplace. The regulation "...is intended to address comprehensively the issue of evaluating the potential hazards of chemicals, and communicating information concerning hazards and appropriate protective measures to employees".

The MSDS form contains data critical to the health and safety of workers and vital to emergency responders treating exposed individuals. Employers that use chemicals in the workplace, and manufacturers of chemicals such as lubricants companies, are required to be in compliance with this regulation. According to OSHA, this regulation is the most often violated; infringement can carry fines amounting to \$70,000 or more per citation. It is in your lubricant company's best interests to have the finest system available today for accurate and efficient management of MSDS compliance.

The MSDS is an important document. The form contains a range of information on chemical substances such as ingredients, components and contaminants, physical data (boiling point, melting point, PH, solubility), fire and explosion data, toxicity, health effects and first aid, reactivity, storage and disposal, spill and leak procedures, conditions to avoid, protective equipment, physical properties, manufacturer information and other technical information. The MSDS varies in look and length depending on its format, amount of content, graphics and font size, and can vary from one to 15 or more pages, with two to four being the most common. Most companies use a 16-part MSDS.

Before the advent of advanced computer technology, MSDS management was most often done manually using word processing software to create MSDS sheets. Information was typed onto the form by hand and the MSDS document was printed out in hard copy on a matrix or laser printer.

To complicate matters, each time there was a change to a formula or a regulation, all affected components of the MSDS has to be altered again by hand. The process was tedious, extremely time consuming, prone to inaccuracies and inefficient.

When data-based information management and electronic storage technologies developed, the MSDS management process was ripe for their application. Fortunately for lubricants manufacturers, a variety of software options exist in today's market to meet the requirements of OSHA MSDS compliance. Complete software solutions for MSDS management, some designed specifically for lubricant manufacturing, are offered which are compliant with industry regulations and offer rich design choices to meet regulatory requirements. With unlimited formats, enhanced graphics, superior editing tools, integration with standard applications such as MS Word and MS Access, and drawing on the power of a central database, MSDS creation software is quick, flexible, easy to use, and accurate.

Features to look for in MSDS software for the lubricants industry should include flexible formats, a powerful database, unlimited printer support, enhanced graphics, standard terminology library, and multi-lingual capability. The ability to easily reissue after a major change to the data and a friendly GUI (graphical user interface) which allows users to interact intuitively with the software, are also important features to consider.

MSDS software addresses three main components: data collection, management, and entry; formatting and publishing; and distribution via mail or email. It is important to identify which components are required before selecting a provider.

Some of these MSDS creation tools also come with added services such as product data, forms layout, ability to compute data from formula, change management control, language translation, MSDS authoring and electronic storage. In selecting an MSDS provider, consult with other colleagues in the lubricants industry, search the Internet, network with ILMA members, use a consultant with MSDS software experience, and, lastly, be sure to demo the product.

The gains to your lubricants company for utilizing advanced technology software for your MSDS management are large. By doing your homework, you'll end up with a faster, more effective compliance process and money in your pocket. Additionally, electronic storage and access to your MSDS by your customers will save you thousands of dollars and can be a major part of your green initiative.

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