

# ISSUE BACKGROUND

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## The Paint and Coatings Industry Focuses on Occupational Safety With its Hazardous Materials Identification System®

As an industry group, the National Paint and Coatings Association (NPCA) has made industry occupational health and safety a leading priority. The association's Occupational Health and Safety Committee is responsible for recommending NPCA policy on matters relating to health and safety within members' facilities. The committee remains alert to developing issues and facilitates communication between the industry, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the American National Standards Institute, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and other standard-setting organizations, to facilitate new standards that are both beneficial and feasible.

The committee keeps NPCA members apprised of recent developments that may impact plant operations and provides guidance documents to encourage full compliance among association members. Toward that end, NPCA publishes regular safety and health bulletins and a *Compliance Guide for the Process Safety Management of Highly Hazardous Chemicals in the Paint Industry*, intended for paint and coatings manufacturers to use in developing a process safety management program. The association also runs a Safety Awards Program that recognizes superior safety performance, and compiles valuable information about health and safety practices in the coatings industry. In every way, NPCA is an advocate of its industry's commitment to workplace safety.

### THE HAZARDOUS MATERIALS IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM®

In keeping with its commitment to workplace safety, NPCA developed the Hazardous Materials Identification System® (HMIS®) in 1981 to help employers comply with OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (Hazcom). Hazcom requires employers to provide workers who are potentially exposed to hazardous substances with useful information about the dangers of these substances and about the protective measures needed to work with them safely. Since its creation, HMIS® has become the leading Hazcom compliance system, expanding its user base well beyond the paint and coatings industry to a host of employers who manufacture, distribute, or use hazardous chemicals.

*Issue Background* is a quarterly newsletter featuring detailed background information on an issue of particular concern to the paint and coatings industry. The newsletter is published by the **National Paint and Coatings Association, Inc. (NPCA)**, 1500 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20005. For additional information, contact NPCA's Paint and Coatings Industry Information Center at (202) 332-3194. NPCA can also be reached by e-mail at [npca@paint.org](mailto:nzca@paint.org), and further informational materials are available on NPCA's Industry Outreach site at <http://www.PaintInfo.org>.



## The Paint and Coatings Industry Focuses on Occupational Safety With its Hazardous Materials Identification System®

Currently, NPCA and its partner, J.J. Keller, are working on a new and significantly improved Hazardous Materials Identification System® (HMIS®), scheduled for release in 2002. The enhancements will take a good system and make it an even better tool. This *Issue Backgrounder* explains HMIS® and provides details on the HMIS® III enhancements designed to augment safe work environments and employee health and safety.

### MAKING A GOOD THING BETTER

HMIS® conveys essential information about hazardous chemicals, using a numerical hazard rating system and color-coded bands giving information about health, flammability, and reactivity hazards, as well as appropriate personal protective equipment.

When NPCA first designed HMIS®, it used the health, flammability, and reactivity fields similar to those being used by NFPA, which had developed a parallel system for emergency responders. Although NPCA developed its own OSHA-oriented health ratings criteria, it chose to adopt the widely recognized ratings criteria used by NFPA for flammability and reactivity.

While reactivity has worked well over the years, it has

functioned, in effect, as a surrogate for the more specific physical hazards addressed by the OSHA Hazcom, such as whether or not a substance is an organic peroxide. In 1996, NFPA changed its system significantly, abandoning “reactivity” for a new measure, “instability.” Although NFPA’s new measure was undoubtedly more functional for the emergency responder community, it required NPCA to reexamine HMIS® to assess the impact of this change. After reviewing the NFPA system, NPCA’s Occupational Health and Safety Committee decided that HMIS® and its users should go in a different direction, and resolved to use this opportunity to make HMIS® an even better system for its users.

### HMIS® III

HMIS®, which has over 25,000 users, including members of the chemical, petroleum, health care, public utilities, electric and communications industries, will undergo several revisions to become a more current and efficient compliance tool. The user-friendly HMIS® III will provide employees the tools to understand and handle chemicals exhibiting a variety of physical hazards with a far greater degree of precision than before. HMIS® III revisions will reflect recent changes OSHA has made to its Hazcom system, including placing greater emphasis on target organs, modifying the

flammability rating by adopting OSHA’s own criteria, and replacing the reactivity field with physical hazard, in accordance with OSHA’s specified physical hazards (the specific physical hazards that the Hazcom addresses are flammability, compressed gases, explosives, organic peroxides, oxidizers, pyrophorics, unstable-reactive and water-reactive chemicals). The HMIS® III will not only address these physical hazards with specific criteria to evaluate the degree of hazard, but will permit employers to specifically identify the type of hazard present with an icon or symbol.

Other system changes intended to clarify and communicate hazards include a more distinct label format reflecting the change from reactivity to physical hazard, as well as a number of new icons designed to be placed on the container near the label to enhance the utility of the HMIS® label. These icons will allow HMIS®-trained employees to identify, at a glance, the type and degree of hazard associated with each product they use. This change to HMIS® III permits a worker to know immediately, for example, that a material he or she is handling is rated as an explosive, and that it is rated as a “3,” giving him or her more precise and useful information about the safe handling of that material.

## COMPANION PIECES

NPCA is also developing — with the help of DynCorp, a nationally recognized consulting group with expertise in health and safety matters — an accompanying HMIS® Chemical Ratings Guide to serve as a reference manual providing HMIS® ratings and documentation for a large number of commodity chemicals. The HMIS® Chemical Ratings Guide will provide a rating tutorial, followed by a list of various (300-400) industrial raw materials with their HMIS® ratings in a table format. This will be followed by HMIS® Chemical Data Sheets which are envisioned to contain all the necessary information to justify the ratings. A final section is envisioned to contain information on problematic formulations and mixtures, and procedures for addressing them.

Whereas before employers were expected to develop their own ratings or obtain recommended ratings from suppliers, resulting in varied ratings of common chemicals, HMIS® III users will be able to rely on the manual for well-documented standardized ratings.

With the new system comes a new implementation manual that will contain details on all the changes in the HMIS®, as well as tools need to develop chemical ratings and conduct employee training. Like its predecessors, the new implementation manual will be an invaluable resource in meeting the requirements of the OSHA Hazcom.

## BENEFITS OF HMIS® III

HMIS® has a long history in Hazcom compliance, has proven its value to employers over the years, and OSHA has commented favorably about its usefulness as a compliance tool. The planned changes will make it a better and even more useful compliance tool. While users may choose to move toward adoption of the new system as a result of the replacement of the old reactivity criterion, the best reason for switching is that the new changes in the system will make it more efficient and better, making Hazcom compliance more assured.

In its reconstruction, NPCA has been mindful of creating minimal disruption to current HMIS® users and has retained the system's simple structure, while maintaining its objective of improving an employer's occupational health and safety programs.

HMIS® III, if used correctly, not only provides users more assured Hazcom compliance, but also results in a better-trained, better-informed workforce equipped to handle hazardous chemicals safely.

## TRANSITION

NPCA believes that system users will choose to make their transition to HMIS® III quickly, based on the upgrades to the system. Although the many revisions to HMIS® make it an improved Hazcom compliance tool and a better system in general, the old system will continue to function during the transition period. Existing HMIS® users will have to change the HMIS® labels, wall charts, and training components of their Hazard Communication Program if they choose to up-grade their systems. The old versions of the system will remain as viable as they always have been.

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Or, check out the HMIS®  
information on NPCA's web  
site at [http://www.paint.org/  
market/hmis.htm](http://www.paint.org/market/hmis.htm).

## NPCA

NPCA is a voluntary nonprofit trade association representing some 400 paint and coatings manufacturers, raw materials suppliers and distributors. As the preeminent organization representing the paint and coatings industry in the United States, NPCA's primary role is to serve as ally and advocate on legislative, regulatory, and judicial issues at the federal, state and local levels. In addition, NPCA provides members with such services as research and technical information, statistical management information, legal guidance, and community service project support.

