



It's arrived, as the Internet is helping to simplify compliance

By JASON SCRIVEN

For MSDS compliance, like many other tasks that involve information management, the Internet was considered by some to be the “killer app.” The e-prophets foretold of universal accessibility, easy document and data storage and low cost.

While all of this is possible using the Internet, acquiring and maintaining MSDSs in a cost-effective manner is no small job. Can your company actually use the Internet to better manage your MSDS needs?

The answer is certainly “yes.” Of course, the most obvious approach is to go directly to the manufacturer or

distributor from whom you purchased the hazardous materials. They are required to provide their customers MSDSs, however documents are sometimes lost en route, or received and misplaced. The burden then falls on you, the user, to obtain any missing MSDSs.

If you need to look to a source other than the manufacturer, the Internet can prove to be a great help. It can enable you to maintain MSDS compliance by helping you find the MSDSs you need and then managing them.

Start now

You can start using the Internet right now to search for, view, save and print

MSDSs. Try using a search engine such as Google (<http://www.google.com>) to search for a manufacturer MSDS. For instance, type in “3M MSDS” and you will receive 6,150 results from Google, including the master search page for 3M MSDS at <http://search.3m.com> and links to many other MSDS portals. MSDS portals generally do not provide MSDSs themselves, but they'll steer you in the right direction.

Where to Find MSDS on the Internet (<http://www.msds.us/msds>) is a frequently updated site with links to specific manufacturer sites, other MSDS collections and information on MSDS

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service providers or companies that can manage your MSDSs for you. This site even provides an MSDS De-Mystifier (<http://www.msds.us/.msds/ref/demystify.html>), which simplifies reading and understanding an MSDS using a proprietary tool called the MSDS HyperGlossary.

When using the Internet for MSDS

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management, you have to be able to trust a Web site. Some “free” MSDS sites, many of which were launched during the Internet frenzy of the late 1990s, often claim to have thousands of MSDSs, direct from the manufacturer, available at no charge. However, because these Web sites have generated little revenue and maintain a limited staff, chances are their MSDSs have not been kept up-to-date and are likely outdated.

Managing your MSDS

Once you have found your MSDS, you can also use the Internet to manage it, either through your own company Intranet, or by using an MSDS management tool hosted by a service provider. If you are a manufacturer that publishes your own MSDSs, you can make them available to the world via the World Wide Web. Otherwise, you should only do it yourself if you run a sophisticated and fairly tight MSDS obtainment and information management process.

For instance, a company that central-

ly buys a small number of hazardous products from a small number of vendors who distribute their MSDSs reliably could scan or re-key their MSDSs into a master database system and then make the MSDSs electronically available over its corporate network or Intranet. There would be some cost for the data entry, and you’ll need a crack IT team.

Or if you have a large hazardous materials inventory and you buy from hundreds of vendors instead of a few, you’ll need to know how well you can control the reliability of receiving the data you need. Additionally, if each of your facilities handles its own procurement, will they all require staff dedicated to data entry and MSDS database management? And what about your IT support — is it available 24/7? These issues need to be addressed in order to stay compliant and cost-effective if you choose to manage your own MSDS system.

If you are a mid-sized company with more than one facility and limited staff and dollars, you might want to consider a service provider.

Providing help

Service providers can generally reduce your cost to manage MSDSs by at least 30 percent and increase your compliance to near 100 percent. Many service providers are available to give you an Internet platform to share, distribute and manage your MSDSs. If you want to find the MSDS yourself, and just need a place to store and share your MSDSs, use a company that can create virtual e-binders for you and your employees to populate and access via a secure Web page.

Many companies offer full MSDS management programs in addition to Web- or Intranet-based distribution and sharing. They all have differences, so decide what you need ahead of time by

asking these questions:

1 Do you want a pure Internet solution? Some businesses, for security reasons or IT limitations, cannot provide universal access to the Web for all their employees. Ask the service provider if they can link to your Intranet or install and service a PC-based solution.

2 How unique is your hazmat inventory to your business? If most of your hazardous materials are janitorial in nature, then almost any service provider will do. However, if you work with products and chemicals specific to your industry, find a provider with a track record of working with businesses like yours.

3 What kind of ongoing support will you need? If you need a partner to assist your IT department, help you manage your hazmat inventory or provide EHS support 24/7, ask the service provider if these are included with the service you purchase.



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ment of the 3E Online™ system, which includes chemical inventory management, MSDS search, view and print, regulatory reporting and waste activity tracking.

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