



MSDS Software: Putting Your Regulatory Data to Work

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Finding a better way to manage chemical information has led the EHS world to technology. In many ways, MSDS Management paved the way for automated of compliance data tracking. Using information already collected to streamline regulatory and environmental compliance is the logical next step. These days there are a myriad of regulations and reports that must be tracked, from governmental agencies to corporate mandates, ISO certifications, and green initiatives. How does an under-resourced EHS professional or team efficiently manage the monster that regulatory compliance can become?

The number of regulations to track keeps expanding. The Department of Homeland Security now requires reporting of specific chemicals of interest. If products are sold to countries with RoHS lists (this includes the European Union (EU) and China) prohibited chemicals must be tracked and fully documented. The United Nation's approval of the Globally Harmonized System (GHS) and the subsequent or pending adoption by a large number of agencies and countries worldwide, introduces new concerns like the reclassification of product MSDSs and the generation of associated workplace and product labels. Pre-registration of chemicals for the EU's Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (R.E.A.C.H.) requirement is currently active and registration will follow shortly. In today's market the intricacies are mind-boggling and the spreadsheets of old are struggling to keep up with the

complex lists and calculations. Ensuring all the proper chemical and regulatory information is updated, integrated, and shared is a huge task. The mere thought of finding a way to manage this efficiently to avoid workplace incidents or fines is enough to make anyone's eyes glaze over.

A software solution is an obvious answer to the challenges raised by regulation management. Software that is comprehensive from a vendor who is knowledgeable and service-oriented is a necessity. But here again, one is faced with many options that may be difficult to accurately navigate without sufficient technical experience. A few keys elements include: understanding the true functionality of the software after the technical and marketing jargon is removed, evaluating security risks, and choosing the best software platform (like web-based or client-based applications), and having a clear picture of your need to avoid overbuying. When one does manage to sort through the options and pick a solution, justifying the cost becomes the next hurdle that must be overcome. This article seeks to get to the bottom of some of these questions and provide you with useful advice for finding and justifying the cost of a software vendor like SiteHawk that is can ensure you meet your specific regulatory and environmental compliance needs.

The Benefits of Software

Software can centralize information that was once difficult to compile. In addition, when the database structure is set up properly, information can be applied to multiple

functions and fully utilized. For instance, data tracked for MSDS and Chemical Management can also be used to create workplace labels and, with software like SiteHawk, can be appropriately manipulated for simpler and easier reporting. Complex reporting like Tier II and Form R can be streamlined by software that is integrated with the regulatory lists and able to perform intricate calculations and cross-references. REACH determinations can be more efficient and registration more cost-effective and well-organized. Cost justification is improved when data can be optimized and used for multiple business functions.

One of the most difficult facets of managing regulatory compliance is keeping existing regulatory data current and being aware when new regulations are added. If software is created in-house and managed by your team, updating the mechanisms that track that data can be cumbersome and easily susceptible to human error. The right regulation data management software vendor can help. Software scripting can automate processes, making uploads, cross-references against chemicals, and distribution of new regulatory information a one-step procedure. Software vendors should also apply resources to ensure they are aware of updates and changes to content which save you from the tedious work of searching for and reading long regulatory documents. Outsourced software puts the onus on the vendor to supply time and resources to interpret, calculate, and program software to properly apply all new information. This can save you considerable time and headache when changes to regulations require complex calculations or reports. The time and cost benefit of not having to allocate resources to researching, programming, and applying updates is an important element in cost justification.

What to Look For:

Being aware of what questions to ask and what issues to thoroughly investigate before making a decision can greatly streamline your purchasing process. Consider the following before moving forward.

- Be sure the vendor has the knowledge base necessary to truly understand your technological and regulatory compliance

needs. This should include the entire organization from Sales to IT to Support. All members should be informed and understand the complexities compliance. In addition, find out what kind of support is included, whether it is technical or regulatory compliance or both.

- Be sure the vendor stays current with regulations and has an established method for keeping you informed of the related changes. Require a potential vendor to supply you with referrals and be sure to inquire if the vendor approaches regulatory information and updates proactively rather than reactively.
- Often security is the largest concern as it is often the least understood. In all infrastructural information technology, everyday risk is present. The greatest and most costly disruptions can occur when something that has always functioned without effort or thought, stops working. "Every vendor should have methods in place to ensure availability, reliability, and extensibility." Dani Amendola, Director of Technology with SiteHawk, said. "Ask your vendors about security (physical, network, and application); environmental risk avoidance such as climate control, fire suppression, redundancies in systems, power and connectivity failure; and in the case of statistically unavoidable realization of risk, ask about risk mitigation." With proper application, software security can become an asset rather than a liability.
- Investigate the software to ensure it is configurable and able to track and report according to your specific needs. Avoid the "silver-bullet mentality" from vendors who offer one technological implementation that will solve all your problems. In reality, there is no single solution that will suffice for every scenario. Understand your own needs, have them prioritized and ask your vendor if they have a solution to each one, what the solution is, and who has used it in the past. If it is a new feature being created for you, ask for references of other customers for whom such custom development work has been completed.

- Whether you elect to manage the data in-house or decide to reduce internal resource burdens by contracting with a vendor who supplies data indexing services, remember that the end result is only as good as the information supplied, simplified; garbage in equals garbage out. Be sure your chosen vendor is accurate as well as willing and able to supply quality assurance policy and statistics. When dealing with regulatory concerns, inaccurate data could result in severe consequences from large fines to harmful effects for the corporate image, ultimately resulting in a negatively impacted bottom-line.
- Beware of hidden fees and resource drains. To avoid incurring surprise costs, be sure you understand how the chemical data, regulatory lists, and software will be updated and the associated costs. Require documentation that specifically lists what updates are included in the standard fee. Find out if you will need to allocate resources on your end and what level of expertise those resources will need. Be sure to inquire how much time your IT department will need to invest. Things to consider include: hardware and software upgrades; data backups; physical, network and application security; general system maintenance; disaster recovery and business continuity; development of new features and uses; etc. If a vendor is web-based, most of these concerns should be handled by the vendor with little, if any, need for assistance from your IT group.



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Contracting with a reliable vendor can ensure that you don't spend your time updating spreadsheets and data, performing calculations, or searching the Internet to track down regulatory requirements. In the end, you should be looking for more than a vendor who you only see at the time of the sales transaction. Rather, you should consider this a process of finding a long-term partner who can be counted on to assist with the on-going process of regulatory compliance management in today's evolving marketplace.