



# The General Duty Clause

## Clean Air Act Section 112(r)(1)

The General Duty Clause says: "The owners and operators of stationary sources producing, processing, handling or storing [a chemical in 40 CFR Part 68 or any other extremely hazardous substance] have a general duty [in the same manner and to the same extent as the general duty clause in the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)], to identify hazards which may result from... releases using appropriate hazard assessment techniques, to design and maintain a safe facility taking such steps as are necessary to prevent releases, and to minimize the consequences of accidental releases which do occur."

### What is the General Duty Clause (GDC)?

In the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, Congress enacted Section 112(r)(1), also known as the General Duty Clause (GDC), which makes the owners and operators of facilities that have regulated and extremely hazardous substances responsible for ensuring that their chemicals are managed safely.

Facilities have been required to comply with GDC since November, 1990.

### Who is Covered?

The General Duty Clause applies to **any** stationary source producing, processing, handling, or storing regulated substances or other extremely hazardous substances (EHS). Extremely hazardous substances are any chemical listed in 40 CFR Part 68, or any other chemical which may as a result of short-term exposures because of releases to the air cause death, injury or property damage due to their toxicity, reactivity, flammability, volatility or corrosivity.

### What Does the General Duty Clause Involve?

Facilities subject to the General Duty

Clause are responsible for, among other things:

- knowing the hazards posed by the chemicals and assess the impacts of possible releases;
- following codes, standards and other business practices to ensure the facility is properly constructed and maintained - and the chemical is managed safely; and
- having a contingency planning process, which would involve community responders, if necessary, to aid in an adequate response in the event of an accident.

### The Risk Management Program

The Risk Management Program is also part of the Agency's Section 112(r) program dedicated to recognizing hazards and preventing accidents. It differs from the GDC in that it requires facilities that use listed toxic or flammable chemicals above certain thresholds to make their hazard assessment, emergency response and prevention program information available to the public.

## Meeting your GDC Obligations

It is important to understand that the General Duty Clause is not a regulation and “compliance” cannot be checked against a regulation or submission of data. GDC requires you to be continuously vigilant about hazards and their reduction. It is a continuing obligation rather than a one time reporting event.

The General Duty Clause requires you to identify the “state of practice” in your industry: what are similar businesses doing to identify hazards, design and maintain a safe facility, and minimize the consequences of accidental releases? Generally, among other things, you should:

- (1) Adopt or follow any relevant industry codes, practice or consensus standards (for the process as a whole as well as for particular chemicals or pieces of equipment).
- (2) Be aware of unique circumstances of your facility which may require a tailored accident prevention program.
- (3) Be aware of accidents and other incidents in your industry that indicate potential hazards.

## Examples

- A facility installed a water-based fire suppression system in storage areas that contained water-reactive chemicals. This created a clearly hazardous condition. The General Duty Clause required the facility to install a fire suppression system that was compatible with water reactive chemicals.
- Preventing and mitigating accidental releases related to Y2K failures is a GDC obligation.

## Answers to Your Questions

*I don't have to report under the Risk Management Program because I lowered my thresholds - and I believe that I lowered*

*my risk. Am I still subject to General Duty Clause?*

Yes. If you use an extremely hazardous substance in any amount you are subject to the GDC.

*How can I find out what GDC inspectors are looking for at my facility?*

Read the [Guidance for Implementing the General Duty Clause](#) which will be available this Summer on CEPPPO's website.

*How can I find out about accidents and recognized hazards in my industry sector?*

Your trade association is a good place to start. CEPPPO, OSHA and the Chemical Safety & Hazard Investigation Board periodically issue hazard bulletins and accident investigation reports. EPA also issues Chemical Safety Alerts and Enforcement Alerts on recognized hazards. EPA's Emergency Release Notification System is a useful first stop for tracking accidents.

*How has OSHA's GDC been applied?*

Like the GDC of the Clean Air Act, OSHA's GDC applies when: (a) an employer fails to render a workplace free of hazard; (b) the hazard is recognized either by the employer or generally within the employer's industry; (c) the hazard causes or is likely to cause death or serious harm; and (d) there are feasible means by which the employer can eliminate or materially reduce the hazard.

*What are the penalties for non-compliance with the GDC?*

The Clean Air Act section 113(b) allows EPA to assess penalties of up to \$27,500 per day for each violation.

### **For More Information on the General Duty Clause, Chemical Safety Alerts, or the Risk Management Program ...**

CAA Section 112(r) Hotline  
Monday - Friday, 9am - 6pm, EST  
(800) 424-9346 or (703) 412-9810  
CEPPPO's website: <http://www.epa.gov/ceppo>