

# MSDS Spotlight

## Talos: The Future of MSDS

by Srimal Wangu Choi

The key function of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) is to provide information on the physical and health hazards of chemicals in the workplace. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Hazard Communication Standard (49 CFR 1910.1200) requires all facilities to provide MSDSs to workers handling hazardous chemicals. For this reason, writing and distributing up-to-date MSDSs is an essential task for all chemical, pharmaceutical, and similar businesses, and access to current MSDSs is integral to maintaining safety standards for any business in which chemicals are used.

Many businesses create MSDSs using simple word processing programs, and many facilities catalogue them in hardcopy form. Unfortunately, this type of system is bulky, inconvenient, and unreliable. At critical times, the relevant MSDS may be impossible to find—and often the hardcopy MSDS on hand is out of date. For these reasons, many companies are currently making the transition from word-processor generation and hardcopy distribution of MSDSs to software solutions. These systems allow authors to efficiently create and update MSDSs, and

allow companies to make their documents available over the Internet anywhere in the world.

In 1996, Pfizer Inc.'s Corporate Environment, Health & Safety (EHS) Department found themselves reevaluating their MSDS-related processes. The EHS professionals at Pfizer were looking for an MSDS authoring product that would offer a wide range of features, ease-of-use, and the flexibility required to meet the diverse needs of a large multinational organization. Pfizer decided to work collaboratively with Redshift Technologies, Inc., a software development firm specializing in EHS solutions, to create a system that is easy to use, easy to access, and easy to maintain. Four years of intensive development by Redshift in collaboration with beta users at Pfizer resulted in a comprehensive system called Talos. "Talos grew out of the idea that the process of MSDS authoring can be easy, intuitive, and interesting, allowing professionals to focus on environmental health and safety issues rather than entering data," says Kyung Choi, Manager of Application Development. "The system has constantly been improved since its inception through development in conjunction with MSDS authors. The result is an MSDS authoring and distribution system created by EHS professionals, for EHS professionals." Talos is currently used to generate, store, distribute, and track MSDS documents.



### Ease of Use

One of the most important requirements during development of Talos was that the system be easy to use. For EHS professionals that create MSDSs, Talos optimizes productivity by providing the tools the author needs to work most efficiently. In addition to WYSIWYG ("What You See Is What You Get") technology, Talos incorporates phrase-based authoring, in which the MSDS author is given a list of stan-

standard phrases as well as the option to create additional phrases. This point-and-click, phrase-based interface makes the MSDS authoring process easy to learn and makes the process of creating MSDSs more efficient. MSDS authors that have used Talos say that it takes them half as much time to create an MSDS document now than it did when they used conventional authoring tools, such as a word processing program.

### Additional features

Text can be displayed in a variety of fonts and formats, and images and other files can be embedded in the document. Authorized users have the ability to add, delete, and rename MSDS sections, fields, and views. Complete search features allow Talos users to find relevant MSDSs quickly and easily. Real-time collaboration is possible, allowing different professionals to work on the same MSDS at one time. Multilingual tools help users translate the documents into other languages, a feature that is essential for any large multinational organization. MSDS

output is organized so that any EHS professional, MSDS author, or facility worker can easily read and understand the document, and the output is available in multiple formats, including RTF, ASCII, and PDF. In addition, a comprehensive MSDS approval process ensures that MSDSs will only be publicly accessible when fully reviewed and approved by a supervisor, helping to assure that any distributed MSDSs are error-free.

Once an MSDS has been authored or revised and approved, Talos provides a distribution system to store, distribute, and track MSDS documents. Talos Distribution is a web-based tool that automates and manages MSDS storage, delivery, and tracking. Since it integrates with the Talos authoring system, users can be confident that the latest versions of MSDSs are available at all times. Recipients of the documents can also be automatically updated with new versions of documents. The distribution system allows users to manage and distribute their latest MSDSs efficiently and reliably.

The first version of Talos was deployed

at Pfizer Inc.'s Corporate EHS Department in 1999. Since then, the system has been used successfully and has been continuously upgraded—with the help of user feedback—to enhance features and expand functionality. The latest version, 2.7, is currently available and is under consideration by world-class pharmaceutical, chemical, and manufacturing organizations.

The collaboration between EHS professionals and software developers has resulted in a system that is easy to use, saves time and money, and, as one MSDS author stated, “allows me to spend less time on the time-consuming responsibility of authoring MSDSs and more time on intellectual challenges related to the EHS profession.”

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