Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) play a key role when it comes to employee health and safety. Proper MSDS management requires three main fundamentals. First, employees should have access to MSDSs on a 24/7/365 days a year basis. Second, these MSDS records must be kept current and up to date at all times. The third important factor is that old versions of MSDSs are kept archived for the OSHA 30-year requirement.

With the technology resources available in today's market, this job has become much less cumbersome for the EHS professional. Many MSDS vendors today offer a variety of software and services to aid companies in complying with the OSHA regulations as they pertain to MSDS management.

Is there an all-in-one solution?
When looking for a MSDS management solution, let it be known that there is not one single database out in the market that contains all MSDSs in existence. With this in mind, a company should concentrate on the MSDSs that they are using within their facilities and not look for one massive database of MSDSs to solve all their management needs.

Over the past decade numerous vendors have developed and designed software programs that allow the EHS administrator to manage these MSDSs with ease and efficiency. Many programs are based around the idea of indexing and scanning your MSDSs into a program for fast and easy review. These scanned images are electronic photocopies of your MSDSs. Key word searches are used to find the MSDS the user is looking for. Many of these types of systems are easy to install and are generally very user friendly. Advances in these types of systems have been great over the past five years with increased capabilities such as web retrieval of MSDSs and automatic updates of MSDSs via the Internet.

Best of both worlds
Along with MSDS management, vendors providing software are also offering services with their software packages. This is a great way for a company to get started down the road to successful MSDS management. These services include the initial scanning and indexing of a company's MSDS files, allowing the EHS professional to concentrate on other aspects of their jobs rather than doing massive amounts of data entry. In many cases outsourcing this type of work to vendors who specialize in MSDS management is a more cost-effective way than doing it in house or hiring temporary staff.

There are also MSDS management vendors in today's market offering complete MSDS management software and services—an excellent
Organizational Process Management software solution for Lockout/Tagout!

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direction for a company to go when safety department resources are limited. These types of vendors will take over complete management of your MSDS files, including indexing, scanning, and updating services (updating your MSDS records when they become available). This information can then be provided back to the customer via the Internet/Intranet. With this arrangement, the MSDS vendor updates your database and immediately provides it back to you electronically. You may then deploy the database on your company Intranet, and use the MSDS management software that is provided to print labels, binders and perform inventory and regulatory reporting—indeed the best way to go if you want a good MSDS management system for reporting purposes yet wish to outsource the indexing, scanning, and updating services.

With all the options that are being offered in today's MSDS marketplace EHS professionals can move away from dusty three ring binders and begin using online systems and services. A safer work environment can now be accomplished with just a few clicks of a mouse.

Joe Kelleher, Executive Director of Sales and Marketing, Online-MSDS by K.H.A., can be reached at 800/ 274 4995 and jpk@online-msds.com. For additional resources on MSDS management, visit the MaintenanceResources.com Safety subsection of the Products Showcase at: http://www.1shoppingcart.com/app/aftrack.asp?AFID=9047.