

The U.S. Forest Service Stays Green and Keeps Compliant



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Walt Sternke

Regional Environmental Engineer
U.S. Forest Service, Southern Region

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- Manages 13.5 million acres of public lands across 13 states and PR
- Maintains a library of over 2,100 safety data sheets
- Uses VelocityEHS Chemical Management for chemical management, location tracking and chemical replacement

The Southern Region of the U.S. Forest Service manages 13.5 million acres of public lands across 13 states and Puerto Rico. Its over 2,300 employees must maintain vibrant ecosystems that range from rainforests to grasslands to beaches — which are visited by 28 million Americans each year.

Several years ago, as alignment with the Globally Harmonized System of hazardous chemical classification (GHS) began to draw near, the Forest Service started looking for a cloud-based solution that would help it manage its diverse SDS library over multiple locations, align fully with GHS, and help maintain its environmental and preservation mission.

Walt Sternke has been the Regional Environmental Engineer for the Forest Service Southern Region since 2000, and spearheaded the adoption of VelocityEHS Chemical Management.

“We knew that being in compliance with GHS would be a big job for an organization of our size,” explains Mr. Sternke. “We have 326 locations where we manage and store hazardous materials, and SDSs for more than 2,100 products. We have stuff you’d expect — like wasp killer and large amounts of WD-40 — but also chemicals for research laboratories. Our inventory is always expanding.”

According to Mr. Sternke, the Forest Service first learned of VelocityEHS Chemical Management through an online solicitation.

“Our regional safety officer received an email from VelocityEHS, and asked me to follow up. It turned out that one of our ranger districts in California was already a VelocityEHS Chemical Management customer. I called them, and they described a really positive experience with the [VelocityEHS Chemical Management] product. It sounded like what we needed for the GHS switchover. Before we made

the final decision, I made up a fact sheet describing the system. I like fact sheets. Being an engineer, that’s how I look at things. I took the VelocityEHS fact sheet I’d made to my higher-ups. Our director was quite familiar with safety data sheets, and he said ‘Walt, that looks like a tremendous idea!’”

After adopting VelocityEHS Chemical Management, Mr. Sternke reports that his organization enjoyed improved SDS management on several levels.

“Previously, we were using paper SDSs and copying those for all our locations. It was very time-consuming. VelocityEHS Chemical Management made everything much easier, and also made some exciting new things possible. The most impressive was when one of our forest service research labs in Mississippi told me he had 526 new products he needed to enter. Immediately, my eyes expanded! But I quickly located the products in our system, and we were able to get the job done no



problem.”

“I also really feel confident with how the system positions us for any future regulatory changes,” Mr. Sternke adds.

Mr. Sternke also notes that VelocityEHS Chemical Management has been a good fit for the Southern Region Database because the system’s functionality can help with its ongoing green chemical replacement initiative.

“[VelocityEHS Chemical Management] lets us record our quantities and keep better track, and it gives our forest supervisors and safety officers an excellent management tool for executing HAZMAT in the forest,” says Mr. Sternke. “We can look at the different locations and say ‘We’ve got a green product here and there. Let’s spread that over the whole forest.’ It’s definitely allowing us to cut down on our use of hazardous materials. We’re always greening up and thinking in those terms. VelocityEHS Chemical Management is a big asset for this. I’ve become a real proponent!”



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