

Dentists Targeted for Recklessly Polluting Water with Mercury Waste

By Dr. Mercola

Did you know that *dentist offices* are the largest source of mercury in wastewater entering publicly-owned treatment works?

Once there, dental mercury converts to methylmercury, a highly toxic form of mercury known to be hazardous to brain and nervous system function, particularly in fetuses and young children.

[Mercury](#) is extremely tenacious once in the air, water, and soil; levels gradually increase over time, as it accumulates. It's no wonder then that contaminated fish and other seafood are the largest dietary source of mercury in the US, courtesy of polluted waterways.

In 2010, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced it would create a rule requiring dentists who use dental amalgam to conduct best management practices and install amalgam separators.

An amalgam separator is a wastewater treatment device installed at the source, in the dental office, that removes 95-99 percent of the mercury in the wastewater. As originally proposed, EPA said the regulation would be finalized by 2012.¹ Such a rule would be a step toward making dentists accountable for future environmental damage caused by their archaic pro-amalgam stance. Amalgam is primitive polluting pre-Civil War product; an invasive process that damages and removes good tooth matter.

The alternatives are minimally-invasive, requiring no such draconian process. Plainly, 21st-century dentistry is mercury-free dentistry.

Why Is the EPA's Mercury Rule at a Stand-Still?

It appeared in 2010 that EPA would move forward to draft a rule, but in fact the rule continues to suffer from a long string of delays and excuses for not being brought forth.

At least 11 states—including Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Washington, Vermont, New York, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Oregon, and Michigan—require dentists to use amalgam separators to reduce mercury discharges. There, the system works fine; it does not raise the cost of dental care, but it does lower environmental pollution.

Do pro-mercury dentists in the other 39 states buy separators? Hardly. If they are putting mercury into children's mouths, and calling them silver fillings, why would they act responsibly toward the environment?

That's why we need a ruling by the EPA -- to apply to all states and territories.

Even the otherwise pro-mercury American Dental Association (ADA) amended its best management practices (BMPs) in 2007 to endorse amalgam separators as an effective tool to reduce mercury discharges in dental offices in November 2013, the US government became the first country to both sign and accept the [United Nations Minamata Convention on Mercury](#), which covers dental amalgam. (The ADA actually fought hard to keep amalgam out of Annex C, the part of the treaty that will be regularly reviewed and can be easily amended, but they didn't succeed. The Convention thus has a path to a full amalgam phase-out, a point well-known to both sides.)

Internal documents now reveal that EPA will announce it has no intention of *ever* proposing its amalgam rule. This abandonment of the public trust has ADA footprints all over it... Thus:

1. You, and other members of the public, will not have the chance to comment on the EPA's mercury rule
2. Dentists will not be held accountable for their mercury dumping
3. Our children will suffer the consequences

Tell EPA to Release Its Mercury Amalgam Rule!

This is unconscionable. Charlie Brown and Consumers for Dental Choice have created a petition demanding the EPA immediately release its mercury amalgam rule for public comment. I hope you will take a moment to sign this petition right now.

Abandoning the long-promised separator rule is a horrid decision. It hands American dentists carte blanche to pollute without accountability, passing the costs onto not only taxpayers to clean it up, but to families whose children are affected by dental mercury in the water (and hence fish), air (via cremation), and soil (and hence, our vegetables).

Furthermore, based on the EPA's promise to act, the environmental protection community stopped pushing for individual state mandates, of which there were about a dozen in the works. By backing off and relying on the EPA to move forward, years have been wasted waiting for what might never happen.

Just what kind of message is the US sending to the international community when, just 90 days after being the first to accept the Minamata Convention, it tosses in the towel and reneges on a four-year old promise to address dental mercury wastewater pollution?

Indiana Department of Environmental Management Calls for Action Against Polluting Dentists

According to the featured article,² the Indiana Department of Environmental Management sent a letter to the city of Elkhart on December 31, 2013, alerting it to mercury levels in its treatment plant exceeding the allowable limit of 1.6 nanograms per liter (ng/L). The limit had been exceeded in June, August, and October that year. The highest reading measured in at 4.4 ng/L. As reported in the article:

"Laura Kolo, utility services manager for the Elkhart public Works and Utilities Department, said the city must act on the violation... and will focus on dentists' offices because Elkhart doesn't have any industrial operations that could be behind the mercury. She noted in a response letter to IDEM that a 2002 report had found dental clinics are the primary source of mercury emissions at public wastewater treatment plants."

Kolo estimates the draft for a voluntary amalgam separator program in Elkhart will be finished by late June. If program compliance ends up being low, the program could become mandatory.

Today, dentists make a higher income than physicians. The cost to them of a separator? About what they make in a single chair in a single day.

Dental Amalgam Is the Leading Intentional Use of Mercury in US

Dental amalgam, a tooth filling material that is 50 percent mercury, is the leading intentional use of mercury in the US (this despite the fact that 52 percent of American dentists have stopped using amalgams). Dental offices generate a variety of amalgam waste³ that gets flushed down the drain, unless dentists implement best management practices and dentists install and properly maintain amalgam separators. Such practices will collect:

- Scrap amalgam
- Used, leaking, or unusable amalgam capsules
- Amalgam captured in chairside traps and vacuum pump screens
- "Contact amalgam," including teeth with amalgam restorations

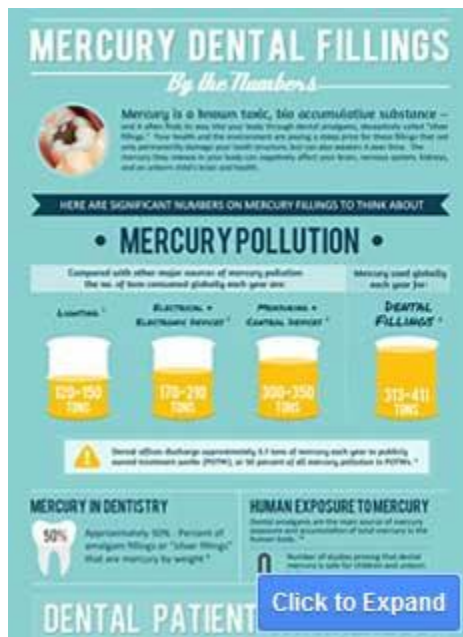
There's a growing global consensus that dental amalgams is a considerable source of environmental mercury pollution. Several studies show that about 50 percent of the mercury entering municipal wastewater treatment plants can be traced back to dental amalgam waste.

This mercury waste amounts to about *3.7 TONS each year!* An estimated 90 percent is captured by the treatment plants generally via sewage sludge⁴ -- some of which ends up in landfills, while other portions are incinerated (thereby pollution the air) or applied as agricultural fertilizer (polluting your food), or seep into waterways (polluting fish and wildlife).

Amalgam is far more costly for taxpayers than the alternative tooth-colored material, when the external costs to the environment and society are factored in. A recent study details how society pays for dental mercury through additional pollution control costs, deterioration of public resources, and the health effects associated with mercury. It shows that when these costs are considered, amalgam is more costly than composite as a filling material, by at least \$41 more per filling.⁵

So EPA inaction means our government is enriching the dentists who use amalgam in the 39 states that don't require separators. The polluter does not pay. With costs lower, it is more profitable to place mercury amalgam -- and amalgam use will grow, not shrink. More American children, not fewer, will receive mercury in their mouths because our government takes sides -- in favor of the polluters.

One would think EPA would look kindly toward dentists who do *not* use mercury, who are not creating a toxic workplace, who are not dumping mercury into the environment, and most of all are not putting mercury into their patients' teeth.



[View the Infographic](#)

A Call to Action

Why should we be forced to pay when irresponsible dentists who still use mercury could easily and relatively inexpensively install amalgam separators, which catch most of the mercury *before* it goes down the drain? At present, the EPA is letting them get away with it, and it's high time for that to change.

I urge you to take a stand with us and tell the EPA not to let polluting dentists off the hook: *It's time to stop dental mercury dumping.*

The mystery here is the position of EPA Administrator, Gina McCarthy. A few years ago, she was the hard-charging environmental commissioner in Connecticut, and before that a deputy in Massachusetts. Back in her days in state government, she clamped down on dentists, requiring not only separators, but posted disclosures in dental offices advising parents and consumers that amalgam is mainly mercury, that it is a health risk, and that alternatives are available. But now the question for the new EPA Administrator is, will she do what she believes it right, based on her experience as a state regular, or will she succumb to the inside game in Washington? With your help maybe McCarthy will return to being as tough on dental mercury -- as she when posted in Hartford and Boston. To learn more about dental mercury and its risks, as well as keep abreast of the latest news on the EPA's mercury rule, please see the following sources:

- [Midnight Deal on Dental Mercury](#)

- [Consumers for Dental Choice](#)
- Join [Consumers for Dental Choice on Facebook](#)