

Mercury Policy Project

1420 North St. Montpelier, VT 05602
www.mercurypolicy.org * 802.223.9000

Contacts: Michael T. Bender, Director, Mercury Policy Project
Stacy Malkan, Health Care Without Harm, 202-234-0091, ext. 14

DENTIST THE MENACE?

Expose shows dentists among largest users of mercury and wastewater polluters; American Dental Association obstructs protection efforts.

Washington, DC – A first-of-its-kind comprehensive report that looks at the environmental impacts of the dental industry's use of mercury is being released June 5 by the Mercury Policy Project and Health Care Without Harm. Among other significant findings, the report reveals that dentists are now the third largest users of mercury in the U.S. and are the single largest polluter of mercury to the nation's wastewater treatment plants.

The report -- "Dentist the Menace? The Uncontrolled Release of Dental Mercury"-- also charges the American Dental Association with working vigorously to impede regulations that would protect the public.

"Despite substantial scientific evidence that mercury is dangerous to the environment and human health, the American Dental Association is actively working against safety measures that would require dentists to trap and recycle this toxic metal," said Michael Bender, director of the Mercury Policy Project.

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin that can affect the brain, spinal cord, kidneys and liver. One in 10 reproductive-age American women already carry so much mercury in their blood to pose a threat of neurological damage to the fetus if they got pregnant, according to a 2001 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention study.

"While many other industries, including hospitals, are phasing out the use of mercury products, dentists continue to use large amounts of mercury and dispose of it improperly. We call on ADA, and on dentists everywhere, to pledge to stop polluting our environment and endangering our health," Bender said.

In the process of restoring teeth with so-called "silver" fillings - which are actually 50% mercury - dentists use approximately 40 metric tons of mercury each year, most of which is eventually released into the environment.

Fortunately, alternative filling materials are available, and there are cost effective devices to properly manage waste dental mercury. "For about \$50 a month, slightly less than the cost of a single filling, dentists could stop mercury from going down the drain," Bender said.

Yet only a small percentage of dentists nationwide are taking steps to collect and recycle mercury waste, including installing amalgam separation filters necessary to reduce mercury discharges.

This may be because ADA has no guidelines on managing waste dental mercury. While ADA's *Statement on Dental Amalgam* (see: www.ada.org/prof/prac/issues/statements/amalgams.html) references the World Health Organization/FDI World Dental Federation's *Consensus Statement on Dental Amalgam* regarding health effects, the ADA's *Statement* is completely silent on environment issues -- even though the WHO/FDI's *Consensus Statement* acknowledges dental mercury environmental concerns, stating:

"Mercury used in denistry may contaminate the environment via the disposal of waste products from dental offices. Modern dental equipment is available to collect metallic waste generated during dental amalgam placement and removal. Appropriate technology is also available to prevent or markedly reduce mercury pollution of the environment..." (see <http://www.fdi.org.uk/assets/pdf/statements/amalgam.pdf>)

###