

THERE IS STILL A PLACE FOR DENTAL AMALGAM

Dental amalgam has recently come into the spotlight again in respect to its suitability as a filling material and its impact on the environment.

Filling Material

The Australian Dental Association (ADA) fully supports the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) view that dental amalgam is a safe, effective material for use in dental restorations. The FDA ruling classifies encapsulated amalgam as a class II medical device, which places it in the same class as gold and composite fillings. The decision was based on a review of 200 scientific studies by government and independent organizations worldwide. Dr Hewson, ADA Federal President, said, "Although the use of dental amalgam is declining, dental amalgam products still have a firm place in dentistry. Dental amalgam remains a safe, affordable and durable cavity filling choice for dental patients."

Patient safety is paramount to the dental profession. ADA policy states that only encapsulated amalgam alloy should be used in dental clinics. Encapsulated amalgam has little to no "free mercury" (mercury that is not bound or chemically tied-up with other amalgamating metals). When properly placed, encapsulated amalgam is durable, dimensionally stable, decay resistant and cost-effective. When encapsulated amalgam is combined with the appropriate adhesive agents it virtually eliminates the problems of weakened teeth and micro leakage commonly associated with most restorative materials. For these reasons the ADA has supported the FDA's view that amalgam is a safe and effective material for use in patients' dental restorations.

Environmental Issues

The ADA is working to ensure that amalgam waste does not find its way into the environment. The dental profession has taken steps to limit the amount of dental amalgam waste entering the environment; such

methods include chair-side traps, suction filters and amalgam separators. A guide on best management practice in handling amalgam waste has been circulated by the ADA and forms part of the national policy framework for the dental profession.

Recently the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) has developed an international framework regulating the use of mercury. Through the World Dental Federation's (FDI) advocacy the UNEP now has a more complete understanding of the use of dental amalgam in many countries around the world. The UNEP has indicated that it would be possible to make special provisions for dental amalgam. The FDI has reaffirmed through its policy statements (with which the ADA agrees) that amalgam is a safe, widely-used and affordable dental filling material and currently serves the oral health needs of the majority of communities around the world, particularly those most disadvantaged and in need of dental treatment. The FDI recognizes that for amalgam to continue to be used as a filling material, it is important that amalgam waste is collected and disposed of correctly.

In Victoria, *Dentists for Cleaner Water* has been launched through a partnership between the Australian Dental Association Victoria Branch, the Environment Protection Authority Victoria, and the Victorian water industry. This program aims to separate waste dental amalgam from water to rid Victoria's sewerage system of mercury in the years to come. Rebates are awarded to private sector dental practices for purchasing and installing ISO 11 143 compliant amalgam separators and entering into a waste collection agreement. The project aims to install amalgam separation technology in 1000 dental practices throughout Victoria by June 2011. The increased environmental awareness of the community, including the dental profession, means that incentive schemes of this kind are now well supported.



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