

South Central Pennsylvanians for a Mercury-Free Environment



Mercury
Policy Project



Reply to:
316 F St. NE, Suite 210
Washington, DC 20002

May 21, 2013

Dentsply Board of Directors
Dentsply International
221 W. Philadelphia Street
P.O. Box 872
York, PA 17405

Re: Community and national groups urge Dentsply to accelerate phase out of dental mercury

Dear Directors:

With your international headquarters in York PA, you provide real value to the people and communities of South Central Pennsylvania. We wish that you will continue to lead the world in supplying needed equipment and materials for dental professionals.

But the time has come to cease making one of the world's leading pollutants: dental mercury. Unbeknownst to many consumers – deceived because amalgam is wrongly called “silver fillings” – amalgam is 50% mercury. Today, alternatives are affordable, available, and effective.

With 140 nations completing a draft treaty on mercury in January – which includes a road map on how to phase down amalgam – the world has turned against amalgam. Dentsply needs to choose whether to risk its fine reputation by continuing to manufacture a pollutant that causes such egregious environmental damage – or to phase it out in favor of the many non-toxic alternatives that you already make.

Joining together in this letter are south central Pennsylvanians from the communities surrounding Dentsply headquarters, with national and international organizations, coming from faith-based, environment, food safety, health, consumer protection missions.

This letter is a wake-up call.

According to the World Health Organization, the amount of dental mercury entering the environment is significant: “A significant amount of mercury is estimated to be released to the environment from the use of dental amalgam either as an indirect result of the diversion of traded amalgam for other purposes or as a result of improper waste management practices or through cremation.”¹

Between 313 and 411 tons of mercury is consumed annually around the globe for use in dental amalgam, accounting for 10% of mercury consumption. Dental amalgam is one of the largest consumer uses of mercury in the world – more than light bulbs (120-150 tons), measuring devices (320-380 tons), and electrical devices (180-220 tons).² This large amount of dental mercury is entering the environment via many unsound pathways. For example, dental mercury is polluting:

- 1) AIR via cremation, dental clinic emissions, sludge incineration, and respiration;
- 2) WATER via dental clinic releases and human waste; and
- 3) SOIL via landfills, burials, and sewage sludge that is spread on agricultural lands as fertilizer.³

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says once dental amalgam is in the environment, “certain microorganisms can change elemental mercury into methylmercury, a highly toxic form that builds up in fish, shellfish and animals that eat fish.”⁴ Methylmercury can damage children’s developing brains and nervous systems even before they are born. **To protect our children from dental mercury pollution, dentalamalgam production must be phased out.**

Despite the serious problem of dental mercury, Zogby polls show that 76% of dental consumers do not know that their amalgam fillings are primarily mercury. Many consumers even believe amalgam is mainly silver, as in “silver fillings”, a misleading term that is still commonly used.⁵ We are confident that Dentsply can supply dental consumers with the environmentally-safer alternatives to amalgam while phasing out dental amalgam production.

We especially caution you not to make developing nations the new marketing target for amalgam. Too often, U.S. and European corporations, finding their toxic product turning into ill repute, begin dumping it in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia.

We ask this: Will Dentsply set a date to end manufacturing amalgam, notify dentists so they will accelerate their training, and continue to make fair and honest profits selling all the alternative dental materials that you already make? Any loss of profits will be a blip on the radar screen. The gain will be the avoidance of community opprobrium because of the horrid environmental health damage caused by your dental mercury. Please reply within 30 days, by 21 June 2013.

Sincerely,

South Central Pennsylvanians for a Mercury-Free Environment

Mary Lu Hale, chair

Willa Lefever, committee member

Richard Burrill, committee member

Ella McElwee, committee member

Leada Dietz, committee member

Jeff Graffius, committee member

Teresa Hale, committee member

Deb Kohler

Kim Jeter, Jeter Wellness

Ronald Fimiani, Assist 2 Sell Keystone Realty

Mark Van Karssen

Rev. Melanie Maxell, Infinite Blessings Ministries

Tammy Fisher

Dr. Ella McElwee, Health by Choice

Barb Dively, Acquired Brain Injury Network of Pennsylvania

Father Tom Johnson-Medland, Lighthouse Hospice

Sister Vicki, Sisters of St. Basil the Great

Brother Jeremiah O'Leary, CFX, Xavierian Brothers

Sister Valerie Heinonen, o.s.u., Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk, U.S. Province Leadership Team

Sister Valerie Heinonen, o.s.u., Ursulines of Tildonk for Justice and Peace

Michael Bender, Mercury Policy Project

Ronnie Cummins, Organic Consumers Association

Charles G. Brown, Consumers for Dental Choice

Sylvia Dove, World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry

Charlotte Pritt, State and Local Public Officials Mercury-Free Caucus

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Dr. Shahriar Hossain, Environment and Social Development Organization (Bangladesh)

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Dr. Lisa Matriste, Australians for Mercury-Free Dentistry (Australia)

Geoffrey Begon, Non Au Mercure Dentaire (France)

Hanna Schudy, EKO-UNIA (Poland)

¹ World Health Organization, *Future Use of Materials for Dental Restoration* (2011), http://www.who.int/oral_health/publications/dental_material_2011.pdf, p.13

² AMAP/UNEP, *Technical Background Report to the Global Atmospheric Mercury Assessment* (2008), http://www.chem.unep.ch/mercury/Atmospheric_Emissions/Technical_background_report.pdf

³ Concorde East West, *The Real Cost of Dental Mercury* (March 2012), http://www.zeromercury.org/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=file&id=158%3Athe-real-cost-of-dental-mercury&Itemid=70

⁴ EPA (2010), <http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/d0cf6618525a9efb85257359003fb69d/a640db2ebad201cd852577ab00634848!OpenDocument>

⁵ Zogby poll, <http://www.toxicteeth.org/zogby-poll--results-2006.aspx>. It should be noted that “amalgam fillings are considered to be economic while they de facto are more expensive than most, possibly all, other fillings when including environmental costs.” Lars D. Hylander & Michael E. Goodsite, *Environmental Costs of Mercury Pollution*, SCIENCE OF THE TOTAL ENVIRONMENT 368 (2006) 352-370.