

Group urges York's Dentsply to stop making dental amalgam

[CANDY WOODALL](#) / *The York Dispatch*

505-5437 / [@ydbiz](#)

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A chemistry professor, nutritionist, farmer and Catholic nuns have at least one thing in common; they want Dentsply International to stop making amalgam.

The silver-shaded substance used to fill cavities is 50 percent mercury, which is both a neurotoxin and environmental toxin, they said.

Dr. Keith Pederman, a chemistry professor at York College, served as master of ceremonies of a press conference held Tuesday afternoon at The Yorktowne Hotel where members of the South Central Pennsylvanians for a Mercury-Free Environment called on the York-based manufacturer to stop making amalgam.

"This is a wake-up call for Dentsply," said Mary Lu Hale, owner of C Yourself Healthy in York Township.

Hale, a nutritionist and massage therapist, serves as chair of South Central Pennsylvanians for a Mercury-Free Environment.

During her career, she has worked with Dentsply employees and genuinely likes them, she said. But she doesn't approve of one of their products.

"Everyone knows and likes Dentsply. But they're making a mistake in making amalgam," Hale said.

Pederman, who also serves as a columnist for The Huffington Post, shared a tragic story about a Dartmouth professor who accidentally came into contact with the most toxic form of mercury and died a month later.

David Dietz, who works on his family's farm in Hellam Township and runs Dietz Produce in Central Market, talked about how mercury gets into the local food supply.

Disposed amalgam ends up in sludge and wastewater, which makes its way into soil and ultimately the food chain, he said.

Dr. Carol Layton, a dentist in Hershey, said she hasn't used amalgam in 26 years. The product is inferior and cracks teeth, she said.

Alternatives to amalgam include composite and ionomer fillings, which are white or clear and do not contain mercury.

In all, 23 organizations - including nine from five other continents - were represented

Tuesday. A letter is being sent to Dentsply on their behalf, urging the company to stop making amalgam.

"The world has come to York today to ask Dentsply to stop making amalgam," said Charlie Brown, president of the World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry.

The alliance works to phase out amalgam throughout the world and has recently focused on Dentsply because the company is the second-leading manufacturer of the substance, he said.

Dental mercury accounts for 10 percent of mercury in the environment, Brown said.

"That's about 313 to 411 tons. That's a lot," he said.

Mercury ends up in the environment through several ways, the group said: the cremation of bodies containing amalgam, air emissions from dental offices, human waste and more.

In addition to hosting a news conference Tuesday, Sisters Valerie Heinonen and Kathleen Coll will attend Dentsply's shareholders' meeting on Wednesday.

The two women are both shareholders and will use the opportunity to urge company leaders to be more environmentally responsible, Brown said.

As of Tuesday afternoon, Dentsply released a statement from Dr. Linda Niessen, vice president and chief clinical officer for the company.

"Dental amalgam has a long-established record of safety, effectiveness and durability as a dental material used to repair teeth damaged by tooth decay," she said.

Amalgam is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and is supported by many organizations, including the American Dental Association, Federation Dentaire International, World Health Organization and International Association for Dental Research, Niessen said.

"In fact, according to the American Dental Association, dental amalgam is the most thoroughly researched and tested restorative material among all those in use," she said.

Dentsply offers amalgam and other restorative dental materials to treat tooth decay, and dentists and patients choose which materials they'd like to use, Niessen said.

"For dentists who use dental amalgam, Dentsply supports the (American Dental Association's) best practices for amalgam waste in disposing of dental amalgam," she said.

- *Candy Woodall can also be reached at cwoodall@yorkdispatch.com.*

http://www.yorkdispatch.com/ci_23293972/group-urges-yorks-dentsply-stop-making-dental-amalgam

Group calls on Dentsply to end production of amalgam

The material, used to fill cavities, contains mercury. When disposed of improperly, the toxic metal can end up in the water supply, activists say.

By LAUREN BOYER

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York, PA -

An area environmental group hopes to draw attention to what it says is a problem -- one that could be inside your mouth.

According to the newly formed South Central Pennsylvanians for a Mercury-Free Environment, dental amalgam is a leading source of mercury pollution.

"Dental offices are the source of 50 percent of mercury discharged to sewage treatment plants," said the group's chairman, Mary Lu Hale. "I'm sure people are not aware of that."

Hale's group, along with the World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry, plans to hold a news conference 1 p.m. Tuesday at the Yorktowne Hotel to raise awareness and call on York-based Dentsply International to end the manufacturing of "silver fillings," which contain the toxic metal.

According to Dentsply's Corporate Social Responsibility Report, amalgam is a mixture of metals including silver, mercury, copper and tin.

In 2009, the company convened a task force to review and evaluate its dental amalgam product line. It examined a wide range of factors, including environmental considerations, the report says.

The company concluded that "dental amalgam continues to be a useful restorative material whose safety and efficacy has been extensively documented," according to the report.

In a statement, Dr. Linda Niessen, Dentsply's vice president and chief clinical officer, said that dental amalgam, which is regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug

Administration, has a long-established record of safety, effectiveness and durability"

when it comes to repairing cavities.

"Dentists and patients have the ability to select from various restorative dental materials to treat tooth decay and restore the tooth to function," Niessen wrote. "For dentists who use dental amalgam, Dentsply supports the (American Dental Association's) Best Practices for Amalgam Waste in disposing of dental amalgam."

Activists say dentists who don't follow the rules are at the root of the problem.

Some states -- but not Pennsylvania -- require dentists to purchase equipment to stop amalgam waste from going in the water, said Charles Brown, president of the World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry, which is based in Washington, D.C.

The group is working with the United Nations Environment Programme on a draft treaty to address the use of mercury.

Other materials, such as resin or glass ionomers, can be used in place of amalgam, Brown said.

"Amalgam is a blip on Dentsply's profit stream. They don't need to make it," he added. "Dentsply is a good community citizen, but it's time they don't fall on their own sword. This is their wake up call."

http://www.ydr.com/business/ci_23284473/group-calls-dentsply-end-production-amalgam