

Advisory Committee on Mercury Pollution

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State Mercury Committee Issues Fact Sheet on Dental Amalgam Fillings

As part of its statutory charge to advise the general public on mercury exposure issues, the Vermont Advisory Committee on Mercury Pollution (www.mercvt.org) released a fact sheet today entitled: "Dental Amalgam Fillings: Environmental and Health Facts for Dental Patients." The fact sheet covers both health and environmental concerns related to amalgam.

"Our fact sheet encourages Vermonters to consider alternatives to amalgam that don't contain mercury, such as composite fillings," said Michael Bender, former ACMP chair and director of the Mercury Policy Project. "There are clear environmental and health concerns related to mercury. The use of dental amalgam adds more mercury to the environment, but using alternatives is another way to reduce mercury loading to the environment."

According to the fact sheet, there is a lot of debate about health effects from mercury tooth fillings. While the Food and Drug Administration considers amalgam safe for adults and children ages 6 and up, there is uncertainty as to how little mercury in your body can cause harm, according to the World Health Organization. The fact sheet notes that there is limited clinical information about the potential health effects of amalgam on pregnant women and their developing fetuses, and on children under the age of six.

In addition, the fact sheet states that mercury is one of the most toxic substances in our environment. Because of mercury contamination, the Department of Health has issued consumption advisories warning pregnant women and young children to limit consumption or not eat certain fish.

"Dental patients should be provided with unbiased information on dental amalgam," said Neil Kamman, ACMP chair and environmental scientist at the Department of Environmental Conservation. "This fact sheet is a step in that direction."

Environmental concerns discussed in the fact sheet include release of mercury from waste amalgam when fillings are either placed or removed. Cremation of bodies with dental amalgams is also a significant source of mercury release into Vermont's environment.

Finally, the fact sheet states that while some countries limit the use of amalgam to reduce mercury pollution, others advise that pregnant women should not have amalgam fillings placed or removed from their teeth as a precautionary measure.

In its 2010 report, the Advisory Committee recommends that the Legislature consider prohibiting placement of amalgam in pregnant women and children. It also recommends an eventual phase-out of mercury-containing dental amalgam by 2012, due primarily to environmental concerns.

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