

# Help Seize This Opportunity to Abolish Mercury Fillings

Analysis by Charlie Brown and Consumers for Dental  
Choice

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Consumers for Dental Choice leads the national and worldwide campaigns to ban dental amalgam, a controversial filling material commonly marketed as “silver fillings” even though it is 50% mercury
- › Dedicated to our sole mission of transitioning America and the world to mercury-free dentistry, our nonprofit group has had cascading successes that are pushing out use of this toxic product
- › Mercury-free dentists are the right choice for the consumer. They focus on the health of the patient and on keeping toxins out of the environment
- › Celebrating Mercury Awareness Week, Dr. Mercola matches your gift dollar-per-dollar donated or postmarked by Saturday midnight August 19, 2023
- › Join us – seize the opportunity to rid our planet of this toxin. Go to [www.mercury-free.org/donate.aspx](http://www.mercury-free.org/donate.aspx) or send a check to Consumers for Dental Choice, 727 15th St. NW, Suite 701, Washington DC 20005

## New Opportunities to Phase Out Amalgam

This spring, an unexpected – but highly welcome – development compels Consumers for Dental Choice to search for additional revenue. Several African nations submitted a proposal to amend the Minamata Convention to add a 2030 phase-out date for dental amalgam.

The proposal also adds common-sense measures to facilitate this phase-out, including (1) submitting to the Secretariat a national plan for phasing out the use of dental amalgam and (2) excluding the use of dental amalgam in government insurance policies and programs. Now we must gear up for the intense global debates over this proposal at the upcoming Conference of the Parties (COP5), starting 30 October in Geneva, Switzerland.

## **Phasing Out the Past**

The dental amalgam we know today was developed in the nineteenth century. And it was controversial from the start. Many practicing dentists opposed it.

Even in some 19th century advertisements, dentists proclaimed that amalgam was “poisonous”. And they had the support of some of the leading names in nineteenth century dentistry. For example, Dr. Chapin A. Harris, long considered the father of American dental science said amalgam “is one of the most objectionable articles for fillings teeth that can be employed.”

This view was reflected in one of the earliest dental associations – the American Society of Dental Surgeons. In 1845, the Association went so far as to adopt a resolution: “That any member of this Society who shall hereafter refuse to sign a certificate pledging himself not to use any amalgam and moreover, protesting against its use under any circumstances in dental practice, shall be expelled from this Society.”

Sadly, the dental profession took an ugly turn. Unscrupulous “dentists” found that they could market this cheap mercury product as silver – and thereby compete with the better-trained dentists who preferred gold. (The white composite fillings that are the primary alternative to amalgam today were not around at this time.)

As one physician observed in 1896, “Certain dentists are themselves aware of the popular dread of mercury and hence the false term of ‘silver filling,’ which is a deliberate swindle and a disgrace to the dental occupation.”

Promoting amalgam as “silver fillings” had an additional perk for the dental industry: customarily, dentists priced their work based on the intrinsic value of the material used. Hence, they could charge more for a gold filling than a silver filling, and more for a supposedly silver filling than for an amalgam filling.

As dental publications in the late 1800s urged dentists to “[e]liminate the idea that the amalgam filling is a cheap filling,” use of the term “silver fillings” proliferated even though mercury remained the major ingredient. To this day, polling shows that many people still believe that “silver fillings” are really silver – and not toxic mercury.

Two decades back, Consumers for Dental Choice began by fighting the “silver fillings” deception and by protecting mercury-free dentists. Fighting and winning at the state level, then the federal level, then the international level, we are now closer than ever to completely abolishing this threat to our health and environment as we approach the debates for the amalgam phase-out amendment to the Minamata Convention.

During this Mercury Awareness Week, Dr. Mercola doubles your donations up to \$150,000 to help Consumers for Dental Choice get the funding we need to build on the momentum from the FDA safety communication. He matches your gift until midnight your time on August 19 (or postmarked by August 21). Click the button below to donate online:



Or you may mail a check to ...

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With your help, we will be well-prepared for the moment at hand, having already laid the groundwork in five key ways. Consumers for Dental Choice:

# 1) Won Protections for Dentists

Consumers for Dental Choice has always worked closely with dentists to abolish amalgam. Early on, only about 3% of dentists were mercury-free. We had to defend the right of these mercury-free dentists to advise, advertise, and advocate for mercury-free dentistry. We had to win back the licenses of dentists who stood up against this toxic product.

We had to fight to get mercury-free dentists – who represent almost half of all dentists now! – appointed to state dental boards over the pro-mercury state dental associations strenuous objections.

Now Consumers for Dental Choice is on the offensive, reaching out to dentists about the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)'s new safety communication. We wrote articles and met with government health officials, advising dentists that in light of FDA's amalgam safety communication, their only prudent course of action is to use only mercury-free fillings.

And we made sure that dental schools knew about FDA's new safety communication – and heard that some are stopping amalgam use in their clinics in response to concerns raised by FDA.

For example, Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine (GSDM) ended the use of amalgam in patient care on 14 October 2020 in direct response to FDA's safety communication. As explained on its website:

*“By eliminating dental amalgam from our Patient Treatment Centers, we are prioritizing the health and safety of our patients and fully embracing the future of dental restorations – while simultaneously doing our part to protect the environment,”* said Dean Jeffrey W. Hutter.

*“GSDM has a well-deserved reputation for innovation, and I believe this decision is yet another example of the Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine*

*being ahead of the curve when it comes to trends in dentistry and oral healthcare.”*

As more and more dental schools reject amalgam and embrace mercury-free materials, the next generation of dentists will be better prepared to not only save teeth but also protect their patients and communities from the unnecessary exposure to amalgam’s mercury.

## **2) Took on the ADA**

The main lobbying force for amalgam since the Civil War, the American Dental Association, has realigned its position. After promoting and profiting from mercury in the mouth and loudly proclaiming its safety, this double amalgam patentholder has started to pull back from its former hard-line position of pushing amalgam onto American consumers.

Here's what we are seeing in the ADA's new official 2022 policy statement Use of Amalgam as Restorative Material:

- **The ADA’s policy no longer says amalgam does not pose a health hazard** – The ADA’s policy no longer says that amalgam “does not pose a health hazard.” Instead it merely “recommends that clinicians review the risks and benefits of all restorative options with their patients.”
- **The ADA’s policy supports reducing environmental mercury** – In 2022, with the Minamata Convention in its fifth year, the ADA at last “supports the globally recognized need to reduce environmental mercury as set forth in the Minamata Convention on Mercury ... as a common good.”
- **The ADA’s policy backs away from using state dental boards as weapons** – The ADA withdraws its long-time policy of openly aiding dental boards in attacking mercury-free dentists. It deletes its written policy of assisting boards with “expert witnesses” in cases involving dentists opposed to amalgam use.

There can be no doubt that our campaign is succeeding. The ADA beats a retreat to higher ground – we clearly have them on the run. But the new policy makes clear that this multimillion dollar lobbying machine is continuing its unconscionable fight to keep using this mercury product – especially in the poor, the unaware, and those dependent on government programs like our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and their families.

### **3) Gained Protections for Children and Vulnerable**

After more than a decade of battle, Consumers for Dental Choice won amalgam warnings from FDA in 2020! The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a safety communication on dental amalgam, finally recommending against amalgam use in people who are at higher risk from the adverse effects of mercury exposure, including ...

Pregnant women and their developing babies

Women who are planning to become pregnant

Nursing women and their newborns and infants

Children, especially those younger than six years of age

People with pre-existing neurological disease

People with impaired kidney function

People with known heightened sensitivity (allergy) to mercury or other components of dental amalgam

This list, of course, encompasses a significant part of the population. As such, FDA's action has the potential to protect millions and millions of Americans from mercury in their mouths. FDA's safety communication also had another significant effect – it created a momentum for mercury-free dentistry that was unimaginable just a few years ago.

In 2013, Consumers for Dental Choice and our global team – the World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry – won an amalgam reduction requirement in the new Minamata Convention on Mercury. Every country that is party to this international environmental treaty must phase down its use of amalgam.

Now armed with the FDA's safety communication advising against amalgam use in high-risk populations, we knew it was time to ask the nations of the world to go further by amending the Minamata Convention on Mercury to protect all children from amalgam.

Consumers for Dental Choice and our international allies undertook a multi-pronged campaign: convincing the Minamata Secretariat that mercury-free alternatives to amalgam are feasible ... persuading the World Health Organization to acknowledge that an amalgam phase-out is possible ... sharing the science and practical policy solutions with governments from every region ... and battling misinformation from the pro-mercury World Dental Federation (FDI).

The mercury-free dentistry movement was present in force during the amendment debates in Bali, Indonesia in March 2022 and we succeeded in winning what became known as the Children's Amendment! On 25 March 2022, the parties to the Minamata Convention decided unanimously to amend the treaty to ...

*"... Exclude or not allow, by taking measures as appropriate, or recommend against the use of dental amalgam for the dental treatment of deciduous teeth [baby teeth], of patients under 15 years and of pregnant and breastfeeding women ..."*

This amendment represents a worldwide consensus that dental amalgam is not safe for children and other vulnerable populations – it is not safe in their mouths and it is not safe in their environment.

#### **4) Changed Dental Manufacturing**

For more than a decade, Consumers for Dental Choice has held news events in amalgam manufacturers' home cities ... organized petitions ... filed shareholder

resolutions demanding that companies reconsider amalgam sales ... and urged the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to issue manufacturer guidance. But the industry dug in to defend its mercury product until ...

The FDA safety communication was the straw that broke the manufacturers' back. Consumers for Dental Choice and our allies followed up with letters to manufacturers signed by 118 environmental, consumer, and children's groups from across America and throughout the world.

Dentsply Sirona – one of the world's largest manufacturer of dental products – was the first to exit the amalgam market. In its annual report to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, this industry behemoth quietly noted:

*"[W]e have discontinued sales for all amalgam products as of December 2020."*

The coup de grâce for Dentsply appears to have been FDA's recommendation against amalgam use in high-risk. As Dentsply explained:

*"In September 2020, the FDA issued an updated recommendation that certain people are at higher risk for health problems from mercury-containing amalgam dental fillings, such as pregnant women and their developing fetuses, women who are planning to become pregnant, nursing women and their newborns and infants, children, especially those younger than six years of age, people with pre-existing neurological disease such as multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer disease, or Parkinson disease, people with impaired kidney function, and people with a known allergy to mercury or other components of dental amalgam."*

When Dentsply Sirona stopped its amalgam sales, we turned our attention to other manufacturers who still needed persuasion, including going directly to the major shareholders. Soon, the other major U.S. amalgam manufacturer, Kerr (currently a subsidiary of Envista Holdings Corporation and previously a subsidiary of Danaher), announced that it has:



*“... ceased manufacturing all Alloy products, including all of our amalgam products that may contain mercury.”*

Kerr goes on to explain that ...

*“Specifically, we ceased manufacturing these products in the third quarter of 2021 and communicated this decision to our customers in November of 2021. As part of this communication, we cancelled many of our customers outstanding orders for amalgams containing mercury and directed our customers to our other materials that do not contain mercury.*

*We also engaged in a vigorous campaign to assist our customers in swapping their amalgam products containing mercury to materials that do not contain mercury.”*

With Dentsply and Kerr is out of the amalgam business, they can now focus on what they do best: developing and selling the many excellent mercury-free fillings available today!

## **5) Built a Winning Coalition**

Consumers for Dental Choice helped found the World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry in 2010. Since then, this umbrella coalition has grown to more than 50 organizations from around the globe that are working to end the use of amalgam.

This is the team that got an amalgam reduction requirement into the Minamata Convention, won the Children’s Amendment to that treat to protect the most vulnerable, and winning amalgam phase-outs and restrictions in their own individual countries.

We are honored to lead this team of talented and energetic nonprofit group leaders and dental experts from around the world, including Bangladesh, Cameroun, Germany, Great Britain, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria, Uruguay, and Vietnam. We are preparing for a showdown at COP5 as we fight for the proposed phase-out amendment to the

Minamata Convention. But we never put all eggs in one basket – even if amendment doesn't go as far as we want, we've got other plans to win!

## **Help Consumers for Dental Choice Phase Out Amalgam**

The World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry, led by and funded by Consumers for Dental Choice, is counted on by the developing countries to provide the technical and legal expertise on dental amalgam at the Minamata Convention conferences; these governments lack the staff depth of the developed countries of North America, Europe, and East Asia.

Consumers for Dental Choice needs to bring its worldwide team to advocate for the amalgam phase-out proposal at this fall's weeklong Conference of the Parties in Geneva and the preparatory regional consultations.

Consumers for Dental Choice is an amazing nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to advocating mercury-free dentistry. Our talented team of consumer advocates, environmentalists, and health professionals work tirelessly – and effectively – to continue the fight against dental mercury around the world.

Consider donating to this worthwhile cause to help eliminate dental mercury. This week, until midnight your time on August 19 (or postmarked by August 21) Dr. Mercola doubles your donations up to \$150,000 to help Consumers for Dental Choice get the funding we need to build on the momentum from the FDA safety communication. Click the button below to donate online:

**DONATE TODAY**

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With your help, we can aim high – for a worldwide amalgam phase-out – and notch a victory like none before.