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American Dental Association on Sweden's Mercury Ban

U.S. dentists' environmental efforts make action unnecessary for dental amalgam

CHICAGO, Jan. 2009 –The action taken by the government of Sweden to discontinue the use of all products containing mercury -- including dental amalgam –for environmental reasons is not necessary for the United States.

The American Dental Association (ADA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have joined forces to provide dentists with step-by-step guidelines for capturing and recycling dental amalgam waste to prevent its release to the environment. The EPA estimates that dentistry contributes less than one percent of mercury to the environment from man-made sources.

U.S. dentists already capture nearly 80 percent of waste amalgam with standard equipment in their practices, and an increasing number of dentists are also using a device called an amalgam separator which, when added to standard dental office equipment, can capture up to 99 percent of waste amalgam. The captured amalgam can then be recycled, preventing its release to the environment.

Valued as a strong, durable and less expensive treatment option, dental amalgam is a mixture of metals such as silver, copper, tin and mercury that has been used in the U.S. for more than 150 years to fill dental cavities. Its use is declining as patients increasingly prefer natural-looking, tooth-colored fillings and as the durability of other cavity-filling materials continues to improve. Currently, amalgam accounts for only about 30 percent of dental fillings placed in the U.S.

Nevertheless, dentists and patients continue to value amalgam as a safe, effective and affordable option for filling cavities which is why the ADA developed best management practices for amalgam waste—to preserve this choice of dental filling material as well as help protect the environment.

A recent economic impact study published in the journal *Public Health Reports* indicates dental care costs in the U.S. would increase up to \$8.2 billion in the first year alone if amalgam use was discontinued. Among other effects, this could cripple dental public health programs that serve as a safety net to millions of low-income people.

http://www.ada.org/prof/resources/topics/amalgam_economic_impact.pdf

Dental amalgam fillings have helped dentists save the teeth of more than 100 million Americans, who otherwise might have lost those teeth. Best management practices, including capturing and recycling amalgam, protect the environment. Based on dentistry's already minimal release of mercury to the environment, the approach taken in Sweden is not necessary in the U.S.

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About the American Dental Association

Celebrating its 150th anniversary, the not-for-profit ADA is the nation's largest dental association, representing more than 156,000 dentist members. The premier source of oral health information, the ADA has advocated for the public's health and promoted the art and science of dentistry since 1859. The ADA's state-of-the-art research facilities develop and test dental products and materials that have advanced the practice of dentistry and made the patient experience more positive. The ADA Seal of Acceptance long has been a valuable and respected guide to consumer dental care

products. The monthly *Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA)* is the best-read scientific journal in dentistry. For more information about the ADA, visit the Association's Web site at www.ada.org