



## INFECTION CONTROL SNAPSHOT

### Amalgam Waste: Best Management Practices

USAF dental services must be environmentally conscious and take action to lessen the burden to the environment from dental wastes that may contain mercury. The American Dental Association (ADA) has published Best Management Practices (BMP) concerning amalgam waste including the most recent update in 2007. The ADA BMPs for amalgam waste encourage recycling to help prevent the release of mercury to the environment.

Over the years there have been increasing concerns about the effects of mercury in the environment. Even though mercury in the form of dental amalgam is stable, amalgam or amalgam waste should not be disposed of with the regular trash, biohazard "red" bag waste, or in sharps containers. Also, amalgam should not be rinsed down the drain. These practices are important because these types of wastes are often incinerated and the high temperatures used during incineration can release mercury to the environment.

Chairside traps and vacuum pump filters are basic filtration system to reduce the amount of mercury solids passing into the sewer system. Amalgam separators are devices designed to remove amalgam particles from dental office wastewater through sedimentation, filtration, centrifugation, chemical removal by ion exchange or a combination of these mechanisms. Amalgam separators meeting the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard can capture over 95% of the amalgam discharged by dental offices into sewer systems. Installation of amalgam separators and the use of BMPs have been shown to reduce discharges even further.

USAF dental facility central waste collection points, turn-in threshold amounts, and processing procedures are determined locally. Local commanders are encouraged to seek possible options with local contracting agencies. Accordingly, some amalgam waste disposal contractors may offer amalgam waste disposal services that may offer more convenience than procedures required by Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office (DRMO) processing. The ADA has a list of companies that recycle amalgam waste including the specific types of waste they will accept and a comprehensive list of questions to ask the recycling company: [http://www.ada.org/sections/professionalResources/pdfs/topics\\_amalrecyclers.pdf](http://www.ada.org/sections/professionalResources/pdfs/topics_amalrecyclers.pdf).

#### Best Management Practices for Amalgam Waste in USAF Dental Clinics

- **Amalgam Separators:** Monitor and maintain to ensure proper function and process all associated amalgam waste and used parts of the amalgam separator (e.g., used cartridges and filters) for proper disposal to DRMO and/or per local policy.
- **Chairside Traps:** Disinfect using a non-chlorinated product, store in a sealed container and process for proper disposal to DRMO and/or per local policy. Do not rinse chairside traps that have had contact with amalgam over drains or sinks.
- **Contact Amalgam:** Run a non-chlorinated line cleaner through the evacuation system before collecting the contact amalgam from the chairside trap. Once dried, disinfected contact amalgam waste may be combined with non-contact amalgam waste.
- **Extracted Teeth Containing Amalgam:** Disinfect with a non-chlorinated product, dry, store in a sealed container, and process for proper disposal to DRMO and/or per local policy.
- **Non-Contact Amalgam:** Collect and store in an air-tight container and process for proper disposal to DRMO and/or per local policy.
- **Used Amalgam Capsules:** Store used amalgam capsules in a sealed container, recapping them, if possible. Process capsules for proper disposal to DRMO and/or per local policy.

#### A Few Reminders.....

- Don't put amalgam waste (e.g., scrap amalgam [contact or non-contact], extracted teeth containing amalgam, used capsules, chairside traps, amalgam separator waste) in biohazard containers, infectious waste containers (e.g., red bags), or regular garbage.
- Use line cleaners and disinfectants that do not contain bleach or chlorine to minimize the dissolution of amalgam.
- Manage amalgam waste through recycling as much as possible; don't flush amalgam waste down the drain or toilet.

#### Just a few things to think about

- Describe your clinic policy for disposing of contact and non-contact amalgam.
- Does the disinfectant in your dental clinic contain bleach/chlorine?
- Why is it important not to put amalgam waste in the regular trash?
- How do you dispose of extracted teeth containing amalgam?

#### If you want more info

- ADA. Best Management Practices for Amalgam Waste. ([www.ada.org/sections/publicResources/pdfs/topics\\_amalgamwaste.pdf](http://www.ada.org/sections/publicResources/pdfs/topics_amalgamwaste.pdf))
- ADA. Dental Mercury Hygiene Recommendations. (<http://jada.ada.org/cgi/reprint/134/11/1498.pdf>)
- USAF Best Management Practices for Amalgam Waste.



Infection Control SNAPSHOTS provide a brief overview of infection control topics and highlight several important issues; they are not intended to be a comprehensive review of the subject matter. Possible uses may include, but are not limited to presentations at staff meetings or sending out e-mail reminders to the dental staff.

USAF Dental Evaluation & Consultation Service/Dental Infection Control <http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil/decs>

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited. 88ABW-2011-0282, 24 Jan 2011.