

Minimizing Mercury

MMSD Dental Pollution Prevention Newsletter, December 2016

By managing amalgam waste, dental clinics have helped Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) see a significant decrease in the mercury reaching the treatment plant. Now, the challenge is keeping mercury levels as low as possible. MMSD is working to reach a very low target level for mercury to meet clean water standards, so even small reductions in mercury to the sewer system matter.

MMSD communicates annually with dental clinics to ensure continued maintenance of amalgam separators and best practices to minimize amalgam to the sewer. Each year, we request the amalgam certification report from the 100-plus clinics in our service area that handle amalgam, and we visit about a third of those clinics. This newsletter includes a few reminders and requests for all local clinics based on observations from this year's reports and site visits.

Use a line cleaner safe for your separator

Although amalgam itself is relatively stable, certain types of chemicals can release mercury from amalgam, causing dissolved mercury to pass through the amalgam separator and into the sewer. The Wisconsin Dental Association's best management practices for amalgam, which are required by MMSD's Sewer Use Ordinance (SUO), recommend against using line cleaners that contain bleach or other chlorine-containing compounds for this reason. Additionally, line cleaners with a low or high pH (that is, very acidic or basic) can diminish the effectiveness of amalgam separators or damage the units.

Check the components of the line cleaners used at your clinic and ensure that they are compatible with your amalgam separator. You can also ask the manufacturer which line cleaners are safe to use with your separator.

Regularly check and change your separator

MMSD's SUO also requires that dental clinics maintain their amalgam separators according to manufacturer instructions. These instructions likely include recommended frequencies of checking the separator for fullness level and changing the collection container. For example, the Solmetex Hg5® amalgam separator user manual includes recommendations to check the sedimentation level of the collection container weekly, and to replace the container every twelve months or when full, whichever comes first.

What's New

- **Dental Pollution Prevention Web Page**
MMSD has launched a pollution prevention web page with information specific to dental clinics, such as the Dental Amalgam Certification Form, the MMSD Sewer Use Ordinance and links to resources for managing amalgam and other waste.

Website: <http://www.madsewer.org/Programs-Initiatives/Mercury/DentalPollutionPrevention>

- **Reducing Paper Communication**
MMSD has historically mailed out the annual amalgam certification, but we would gladly communicate with your clinic electronically when possible. If you prefer to receive your certification and other MMSD communication electronically, send an email from your preferred email address to Emily Jones (contact information below).

Whatever model separator you have, **review your user instructions or ask the manufacturer how often the separator should be checked and changed.** Make sure a clinic employee is regularly checking the fullness level to make sure that the separator isn't getting too full to be effective.

Amalgam-filled teeth = amalgam waste

Extracted teeth containing amalgam should be treated as amalgam waste, rather than biohazardous or infectious waste. The WDA recommends confirming with your recycler that it accepts amalgam waste and using glutaraldehyde or 10 percent formalin (not bleach) to disinfect the teeth.

We appreciate your help keeping mercury out of our waters!

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Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District

