

ADANews

Current Issue

EPA reinstates final rule on amalgam separators

June 12, 2017

By Jennifer Garvin

Washington — The Environmental Protection Agency June 9 issued a final rule governing the management of dental amalgam discharges into sewer systems.

In December 2016, the EPA issued a final rule requiring most dental offices nationwide to install amalgam separators but withdrew the rule following the White House's Jan. 20 memorandum ordering federal agencies to freeze all new or pending regulations. The rule will be effective July 14 and compliance for most dentists will be July 14, 2020.

The ADA, which worked with the EPA for several years on the final rule, commended the agency for what it considers "a fair and reasonable approach to the management of dental amalgam waste."

"The ADA shares the EPA's goal of ensuring that dental amalgam waste is captured so that it may be recycled," said ADA President Gary L. Roberts in a statement. "We believe this new rule — which is a federal standard — is preferable to a patchwork of rules and regulations across various states and localities.

The rule includes reasonable exemptions, a phase-in period for existing dental offices and considerations for dental practices that have already installed the devices. As of July 14, 2017, new dental offices which discharge dental amalgam must comply immediately with the standards in this rule.

The final rule closely follows the ADA's best management practices and incorporates three: requiring use of separators; prohibiting providers from flushing waste amalgam, such as from traps or filters, down a drain; and prohibiting the use of bleach or chlorine-containing cleaners that may lead to the dissolution of solid mercury when cleaning chair-side traps and vacuum lines. The new rule also meets the nine principles established by the ADA House of Delegates as a condition for ADA support for a national rule.

Additional highlights of the rule include:

- Dentists who practice in oral pathology, oral and maxillofacial radiology, oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics, periodontics, and prosthodontics are exempt from the rule.
- Dentists who do not place amalgam and only remove amalgam in unplanned or emergency situations (estimated at less than 5 percent of removals) are also exempt.
- Mobile dental units are exempt.
- Dentists who already have separators are grandfathered for 10 years.

Although less than 1 percent of mercury released to the environment from man-made sources comes from dentistry, the ADA has encouraged dental offices to follow its Best Management Practices for Amalgam Waste to help reduce

discharges of used amalgam into dental office wastewater. In 2009, the Association amended its best management practices to include the use of amalgam separators that comply with [ANSI/ADA Standard 108 for Amalgam Separators](#), which takes into consideration the standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization, a worldwide federation of national standards bodies.

The ADA will develop practical resources to aid member dentists with questions they may have regarding compliance. In addition, ADA Business Resources has partnered with HealthFirst, a vendor that offers ADA member dentists special pricing on an amalgam separator device that will meet the federal regulatory requirements along with recycling services.

For more information, visit ADA.org/RecycleAmalgam.

[Click here](#) to read an unofficial version of the final rule.

[Subscriptions](#)

[Submit Comments](#)

[Advertising](#)

[Permissions and Reprints](#)

