

Amalgam and Environmental Agencies

Iwould like to add a few comments to that of Dr. Kao to the letter of Dr. John W. Burk in the November *Journal* issue on amalgam and environmental agencies.

The EPA has also placed severe restrictions on mercury in biosolids or sludge in treatment plants. This is one reason regulators do not confine their activities to incineration only. As for crematoriums, it is my understanding that they are supposed to have a type of filtered device installed to capture mercury vapor.

Dr. Burk asks why the EPA “gets away with classifying amalgam as 50 percent hazardous mercury.” I agree that this error is a

constant frustration for us. Unfortunately, many dentists will define amalgam as “50 percent mercury.” Our members should remember their metallurgy.

An amalgam by definition is any metal mixed with the metal mercury. An alloy is a mixture of two or more metals that afterward exhibits characteristics entirely different from its component metals. Silver amalgam is also an alloy. While it is true that the starting mix of this material is approximately half and half mercury and other metals, the resultant material is an inert alloy with entirely different properties than either silver or mercury.

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