

CONNECTICUT EYES BAN ON SOME MERCURY USES TO LIMIT WATER POLLUTION

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Connecticut environment officials will rule later this year on a potential phase-out of dental fillings that contain mercury, which environmentalists and wastewater treatment officials have identified as a significant source of water pollution. The public comment period on whether Connecticut law requires the phase-out of dental filling containing the neurotoxin ended June 9.

A state source says the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection decided to address the issue earlier this year after a petition by the advocacy group Consumers for Dental Choice argued that state law on reducing public threats from mercury requires a ban on the once widely used fillings. The state will determine in October whether a phase-out is required under a 2002 state law, known as the Mercury Reduction & Education Act.

Consumers for Dental Choice filed a petition last year alleging that under the state law, fillings that contain mercury exceed acceptable human health risks outlined in the law, and therefore should be banned. The petition was dismissed on procedural grounds, but state officials decided to address the issue before a statewide ban under the mercury reduction act takes effect in 2006. Mercury-containing fillings are currently not on a list of products that need to be phased out under the law. *Relevant documents are available on InsideEPA.com.*

If Connecticut decides to include mercury fillings on that list, it would be the first state to ban such products, and environmentalists hope other states will follow suit.

Sources say dentists in Connecticut are currently following best management practices when handling the mercury. These practices include treating the filling materials as a solid waste as opposed to discharging the wastes through the sewer systems.

Despite these controls, petitioners say significant amounts of the mercury are being discharged to wastewater treatment facilities, which in recent years have argued that these discharges have made it difficult to comply with water quality standards. Mercury in small amounts is known to cause developmental problems in children and neurological effects in the general population.

Environmentalists and public health advocates say that use of the silver-colored fillings have declined over the past decade, with only about a third of all fillings containing mercury. But the advocates say lower-income populations receive the largest share of the fillings, with higher income populations opting for alternatives, such as gold or ceramic crowns.

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