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Oral Statement of the American Dental Association
before the
Domestic Policy Subcommittee
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
“Environmental Risks of and Regulatory Response to Dental Mercury
Amalgam”
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My name is Dr. Rod Mackert. I am a dentist and a professor at the Medical College of Georgia. I am pleased to offer testimony today on behalf of the American Dental Association.

The ADA is the world’s largest and oldest dental association, representing more than 155,000 dentists nationwide. It is our understanding that the focus of this hearing is on amalgam’s impact on the environment. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on this topic.

I don’t want to overlook the obvious, so I’ll first define what we’re here to discuss. Dental amalgam is an alloy made by combining silver, copper, tin and zinc with mercury. It has been studied and reviewed

extensively and, based on the best available science, dentists continue to rely on it as a safe and effective option for treating dental decay.

Now, allow me to share our thoughts on amalgam and environmental issues. We are very proud of our efforts to protect the environment.

We have developed and implemented best management practices—or BMPs—on amalgam waste and are pleased to note that we recently added the use of amalgam separators to that list.

The ADA actively promotes its BMPs, which have had a very positive impact. As one example, we have virtually eliminated the use of bulk mercury in dentistry. Dentists now use encapsulated amalgam, capsules containing a small amount of elemental mercury and the powdered metals with which it is mixed. Because amalgam is now encapsulated, mercury spills are virtually eliminated in the dental office.

The ADA's BMPs have also greatly promoted the recycling of waste amalgam, by calling on all dentists who either place or remove amalgams to use chair-side traps and vacuum pump filters. These standard control methods remove approximately 77 percent of the scrap

amalgam before it enters the wastewater. The amalgam captured by these devices can then be recycled.

None of this would have been possible without the ADA vigorously promoting its best management practices with dentists throughout the nation. We have distributed posters and brochures explaining the BMPs to *every* dentist in the nation (not just to ADA members). The ADA promotes BMPs on its web site and offers, in partnership with state dental societies, training programs for dentists.

In addition, the ADA sponsored the most thorough, peer-reviewed study—which I have here—of the issue of dental office wastewater.

As I mentioned, the ADA this year amended its list of BMPs to include the use of amalgam separators. We took this action because we have gained a lot of experience with separator technology, and even assisted the ISO (an international standard-setting organization) in developing standards for the devices. We have learned that the systems work well, and we now feel comfortable including them in our best management practice recommendations. We are just beginning to promote our

revised BMPs and will make every effort to ensure that every dentist in America has that information at hand.

Another point to consider is the declining use of dental amalgam. In 1990, dental amalgams constituted 68 percent of all dental restorations. By 1999, that figure had dropped to 45 percent. Our most recent estimate is about 30 percent. We expect this trend to continue. In other words, this is a problem shrinking on its own.

I am proud that the ADA and the nation's dentists are taking these steps voluntarily. We are working to protect the environment by educating our members, encouraging recycling and promoting highly effective best management practices. If there are additional things we can do to improve our BMPs, I am confident that we will take the necessary steps to do just that.

Dentistry is proud of its efforts to protect the environment, just as we have always protected the health and well being of our patients. We pledge to continue our efforts. We appreciate the opportunity to share this information with you.

