



There's Nothing Dangerous About 'Silver' Fillings

By LEON JAROFF Wednesday, May 08, 2002

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Diane Watson has had a distinguished career in education and politics, and last year was elected to the House of Representatives, winning 75 percent of the vote in her Congressional district. Representative Watson is also convinced that the mercury in the "silver" (really amalgam) fillings used by dentists around the world is hazardous to the health of everyone with such fillings, afflicting them with a wide variety of illnesses.

Indeed, Watson is so convinced that this April she introduced a bill (**H.R. 4163**) that, after 2006, would prohibit any interstate commerce of mercury intended for use in dental fillings. The bill would also require, beginning as early as this July, that mercury intended for use in amalgam be labeled "Dental amalgam contains approximately 50 percent mercury, a highly toxic element. Such product should not be administered to children less than 18 years of age, pregnant women or lactating women."

Watson is no dummy. Before entering Congress, she was U.S. Ambassador to Micronesia, served for 20 years as a California state senator, was several times named "Legislator of the Year" by the State Bar of California and has an extensive background as an educator. Yet there's that amalgam hang-up.

While still a state senator, Watson got the California legislature to pass a law that required the state dental board to issue a document evaluating dental materials and focusing specifically on the risks of amalgam. The resulting dental board document conceded that "small amounts of free mercury may be released from amalgam filings over time," but that they were "far below the established safe levels."

That apparently wasn't enough to discourage Watson, who like too many other members of Congress is, to put it kindly, scientifically unsophisticated. The mercury in amalgam, it turns out, is not free, but mixed with silver, tin and copper, metals to which it bonds chemically to form a crystalline metallic — and safe — alloy. An obvious analogy, says Dr. Robert Baratz, president of the National Council against Health Fraud, can be made with water, a chemical combination of hydrogen, a gas that can explode, and oxygen, which supports combustion. Yet, like those in water, amalgam's components are tightly bonded to each other. "Saying that amalgam will poison you," Baratz insists, "is like saying that drinking water will make you explode and burst into flames."

.His view is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which reported that "there is scant evidence that the health of a vast majority of people with amalgam is compromised" and the American Dental Association, which

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concluded that "there currently appears to be no justification for discontinuing the use of dental amalgam."

Then where does Watson get her information? Apparently from a small, but vocal, minority of dentists, many of who also decry fluoridation of water and make questionable use of "mercury meters" and voltmeters to convince patients with amalgam fillings that they are at risk. They advocate the removal of existing amalgam fillings — a procedure that could undoubtedly bring them many new patients and enhance their business. Watson, and others, may also have been influenced by an irresponsible "60 Minutes" telecast in 1990. Entitled "Poison in Your Mouth," it gave a respectful and misleading hearing to the anti-amalgam crowd.

Perhaps the most influential and leading anti-amalgamist was a Colorado dentist named Hal Huggins, who assailed amalgam fillings in a 1985 book entitled "It's All in Your Head," promoted his views in seminars, private consultations and through his Toxic Element Research Foundation. Huggins blamed the mercury in amalgam for a wide variety of illnesses, ranging from depression to epilepsy to Hodgkin's disease and was a pioneer in recommending the removal of all amalgam fillings. For all of Huggins's energy and efforts, his dental license was revoked in 1996, the administrative law judge concluding that he had diagnosed "mercury toxicity" in all his patients, including some without amalgam fillings.

C'mon, Representative Watson. Being associated with the likes of Huggins and his followers can only tarnish what has been an otherwise worthy career. Get over your amalgam hang-up and learn not to be taken in by quacks.

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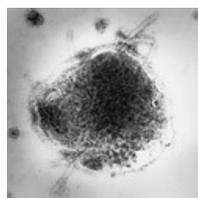


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