A situation developed in the 1840's when two French entrepreneurs introduced the mercury amalgam to the United States. They brought the discovery of a British chemist to the new world who found that if metals were mixed into mercury, the mixture would become hardened and it could be used to fill holes in peoples' decayed teeth. When they arrived in New York at that time, they met with a lot of resistance from the then establishment dental organization, the American Society of Dental Surgeons, as well as most dentists. They knew that mercury is a poison, and it would be unwise to put it into the mouths of humans.

When you look at the whole picture, you see that it was difficult to fix decay in teeth with the materials that were available at that time. There was the old standby, extraction, which defeats the whole intention of restoring the teeth, and gold, which then was so expensive that it caused many to choose extraction to relieve the condition. If the mercury mixture were to be put into the decayed area of the tooth, it would fill the defect, and it appeared to stop the decay process as well. The American Society of Dental Surgeons required their members to sign an affidavit that they would not use the material since it is poisonous and toxic to humans. The membership in the organization was based upon the member dentist following a required set of procedures that would give the patient some assurance that they were receiving the best of quality care that existed at the time.

The pressure to use a convenient and simple material, the mercury mixture, instead of removing the offending tooth, or using gold, brought about the forming of the American Dental Association that did not require the members to refrain from using the poisonous material in the teeth of their patients. So the material became popular and was used frequently all over the world, and the concerns about the poisonous nature of mercury were swept under the carpet. The restorations were dubbed "Silver" fillings by dentists, when in fact they contained only 33% silver, and 50% or more of mercury. The remaining ingredients are tin, zinc, and copper. So we have a mixture of metals, none of them precious metal, and the largest component by far, is mercury. So in my office we refer to them as mercury restorations. Many refer to them as amalgam that means a mixture or combination.

Other countries have begun to move away from the use of mercury in dental restorations. In Sweden, they will not pay for mercury fillings in the new health care system. In France, dentists will be liable for two years imprisonment or a 500,000 Fr (about $50,000) for disposing of mercury in public sewage systems after 1999. Most all dentists put mercury in the public sewage systems in the United States. The Health Ministry of Great Britain has issued a warning against the use of mercury amalgam dental fillings in pregnant women. The government has done the same in France. These warnings are to prevent exposure of unborn babies to mercury derived from the amalgam fillings of their mothers. Obviously they are doing
so with good reason.

For a long time Dentists have argued about the dangers of mercury fillings commonly known as amalgam, or “silver fillings”. Even though the argument has continued for the entire time of 165 years that mercury has been used, The American Dental Association, (ADA) a trade organization of dentists, announced in 1999 that seventy-six percent of dentists choose mercury amalgam for their first choice of material for restorations in the back teeth. I think it could be a higher percentage than that. A spokesperson for the California Dental Association, the state affiliate of the ADA, said that the silver amalgam fillings have been used for 150 years and there is no concrete research that shows there should be a ban on amalgam or that it is toxic. These weak and standard arguments are now withering under the weight of accumulating research to the contrary and public demand for informed consent. Mercury is a poison and it leaks from the amalgam.

In my days of dental school in the sixties, the faculty member that taught us criticized the mercury amalgam. He said it was an inferior substance since it was not tooth colored, did not bond to the teeth, and allowed decay under the filling after 3-5 years. He also mentioned there was no suitable substitute. That is not the case today. No mention was made at that time that the material gives off mercury vapor, which is absorbed into the body and compromises essential body functions, including the functioning of the immune system and nervous system.

In California, on Friday December the 3rd, 1999, a landmark decision was made by the Board of Dental Examiners (California's regulatory board that licenses dentists) by unanimous vote advised dentists to warn patients about the exposure to mercury from mercury amalgam fillings. Failure to take this stand may have placed the Board in jeopardy for violation of California's hazardous materials law (Proposition 65), which states that persons must be informed if they are being placed in proximity to a hazardous material. Although the Board does not have the legal authority to order dentists to comply, some feel that all dentists may be liable under the law if their patients (and staff) are not properly advised.

Because of the wide spread use of mercury in dentistry, it is necessary to become informed about the hazards involved. We have the booklet “Dentistry without Mercury” free upon request. It explains the details of the controversy and gives you the facts upon which to base your decisions. Just call the office, 502-426-4110, and we will send you one. Another informative book, “Mercury Free, The wisdom behind the global consumer movement to ban “Silver” fillings,” by Dr. James E, Hardy. It is available on Amazon.com.
It is concerning to many dentists that the "Silver" filling we have been using to restore teeth, is really 50% mercury and the rest is non precious metal. Having the non precious metal in it permits corrosion, but to have 50% mercury in there is not safe. The American Dental Association (ADA) has now admitted, in 1984, that the mercury leaks from the Mercury amalgam compound. When it is breathed into our bodies, we absorb about 80% of it. When swallowed, we absorb approximately 20% of it. Yet the ADA has released a report in 1999 that states 76% of our dentists choose this material as their first choice for fillings needed in the back teeth.

What is so bad about mercury? This chemical metabolic poison is responsible for problems in many forms. It suppresses the immune system and in doing so it causes all different kinds of maladies and malfunctions in the body. Everyone reacts to it differently. Mercury poisoning is difficult to pinpoint since the symptoms are different in people. Depression and listlessness are some of the symptoms found. Additional symptoms include: Headache, mental confusion, forgetfulness, and rashes. There are many others listed in literature, mentioned below.

"What can I do to protect myself?" you might ask. Get information about mercury and make your own decision. You can get information from the Internet, Public library, U of L Libraries, and you can call my office for a free booklet, which includes research references if you wish to delve into it further.

Consider that the Food and Drug Administration in April 1998, ruled that mercury and its compounds must be removed from "Over the Counter" products by October 1998. Included in the ruling were mercury and 15 of its compounds, including thimerosal in vaccines and Mercurochrome for cuts and sores. They further stated "Safety and effectiveness have not been established for the ingredients included in this current final rule and manufacturers have not submitted the necessary data in response to earlier opportunities." The uses identified were 1) First aid antiseptic drug products, 2) Female contraceptive drug products, and 3) Antimicrobial diaper rash drug products.

Previously, the FDA ruled these mercury-containing products were okay for antimicrobial use on the skin.
These products have a small amount of mercury and its compounds included in them. In the seventies, herbicides and pesticides were legislated to not include mercury in any of its forms. Because mercury is toxic, its effects can be different in everyone. But it is in sharp contrast that the mercury filling is fifty percent mercury and not the small amount that has been ruled "Safety not proven" in the Over the Counter market.

Little consolation can be gained from the fact that the FDA Dental division has also ruled on this. They classify dental mercury and amalgam alloy as dental devices and separately, are safe and effective Dental devices. How can this be? Toxic in small doses on the skin for FDA Medical, and safe in very large amounts in the mouth for FDA Dental.

If you would like additional information call the office (502) 426-4110 and we will send you the booklet I mentioned. Much of the information I used is from the Bioprobe newsletter, Orlando Florida

Get happy and get information. Or is it the other way around? Bob Lavely.

After deciding to have harmful mercury amalgams replaced in your teeth, what is the best way to do it? Many dentists have concerns about the advisability of replacing mercury fillings with composites because of the possible contamination of the patient with mercury during the process. When the fillings are removed there is a large amount of mercury released in the process. These mercury containing particles and the mercury vapor can be swallowed or inhaled. When they are swallowed the mercury absorbed is about 20% of the total amount. If it is inhaled, it is absorbed at the rate of 80% of the total vapor in the lungs, directly into the bloodstream.

The International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT) is an organization of dentists that believe the danger of using mercury in "silver amalgam to fill teeth, is dangerous and toxic to humans. The mercury content of these fillings is 50 percent of the total weight. Silver is only about 25-30%. The other 20% or so is made up of non-precious metals, which will corrode over time. To remove these fillings without proper techniques can contaminate the patient and the dental office and those inside it with mercury vapor. The
IAOMT has established methods of removing the material from the teeth that insure the safety of the patient.

The two ways recommended by the IAOMT are, one; to place a suction device around the tooth being treated, and another behind the tooth. Together with cotton packing, almost all the gas and particles are removed immediately and directly from the mouth. The other method is to use a rubber dam and suction system to remove the toxic material. Both systems are useful in reducing the danger from the mercury. In addition, the person being helped can breath alternate air supply during the process to further insure their safety. More protection is provided by the various mechanisms employed to remove the mercury vapor from the air if any is present. The dentist wears a special mask as do all assistants.

After these precautions are taken, the fillings are removed and replaced with the non-mercury based material, consistent with methods recommended today. The mercury amalgams are removed in large pieces so that the vapor created by the removal is reduced to the lowest possible level.

It is time we stop using mercury in this way. There are so many other acceptable materials available to us now that there is no longer a doubt that this filling made of mercury and other metals is harmful to humans. It is illegal to use mercury in over-the-counter remedies, because of its toxic properties. If a thermometer made with mercury breaks in a school, for example, it is ruled a toxic waste clean-up.