



Dental Practices Management of Wastewater

Dental practices typically generate wastewater from bathroom facilities, through various dental procedures, from teeth cleaning to fillings, from the use of amalgam separators, and through the development of X-ray film. The requirements for managing wastewater are different depending on if the dental practice is connected to sewer system or a private septic system.

Connected to Sewer/Wastewater Treatment Facility

Dental practices connected to sewer systems should obtain prior approval/permission from the local wastewater treatment facility to discharge sanitary waste as well as wastewater from amalgam separators and X-ray film development. As a best management practice, dental practices should have documentation with the wastewater treatment facility that includes details on the amalgam separator and X-ray film development.

Connected to Septic System

Dental practices connected to septic systems should only discharge domestic wastewater, NOT wastewater from dental procedures. If dental practices are discharging any non-domestic wastewater (including but not limited to amalgam separator and X-ray film developing waste from silver recovery units and developer solution), dental practices should contact the NHDES Groundwater Discharge Program at GWdischarge@des.nh.gov. The Groundwater Discharge Program may require testing of the wastewater to determine if a regulated contaminate(s) is being discharged into or onto the ground. If a regulated contaminate(s) is found in the discharge, the facility may need to install a closed system such as a [registered holding tank](#). The holding tank would be emptied periodically by a licensed hauler and transported to a treatment facility. If a holding tank contains enough mercury or silver, it would be a hazardous waste. It would need to be emptied by hazardous waste transporter and managed accordingly. Discharges of non-domestic wastewater that do not contain regulated contaminants require [registration](#) with Groundwater Discharge Program.

Mercury-Containing Amalgam

[Env-Wq 306 Standards for the Management of Mercury-Containing Amalgam](#) was established in 2005. This rule requires all dental offices that remove or place mercury-amalgam fillings to install amalgam separators on their wastewater discharge plumbing, whether connected to a sewer system or septic system. In 2021, the rule was revised to maximize the effectiveness of installed separators. The revision requires dental offices to annually certify (using [the Amalgam Separator Installation Certification Form](#)) that the separators are installed, operated and maintained in accordance with the separator manufacturer's recommendations. Some wastewater treatment facilities will verify the installation of separators connected to their systems. [Mercury/Amalgam Waste Handling Procedures for Dentists](#) provides additional guidance.

Silver-Containing X-Ray Fixer

X-ray fixer contains silver. Silver can be reclaimed onsite using a silver recovery unit. Dental practices need to verify and monitor the system to ensure there is no “bypass” of silver when the filter is at capacity. Review the [Silver Waste Recycling & Disposal Options for Dental Offices](#) for further clarification.

Additional information for dental practices can be found at [Healthcare and Dental](#).

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