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F I S C A L I M P A C T R E P O R T

SPONSOR	Wirth	ORIGINAL DATE	1/28/06	LAST UPDATED		HB	HM 13
SHORT TITLE	Study Dangers of Mercury Amalgam				SB		
					ANALYST	Lewis	

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY06	FY07		
	NFI		

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Relates to HM 5 (Develop Mercury Reduction Action Plan).

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Department of Health (DOH)

New Mexico Environment Department (NMED)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Memorial 13 requests that the Department of Health conduct a study on the dangers of mercury amalgam and develop recommendations for public informational materials and environmental safety.

The memorial further requests that:

- the informational materials address the advantages and disadvantages to oral health, overall health and the environment of using mercury or mercury amalgam in dental procedures;
- the recommendations for environmental safety consider appropriate and acceptable measures for the disposal of dental waste;
- the Department of Health use the research of national and international experts on mercury toxicity and the experience of other states in regulating mercury use and disposal in conducting the study;
- the findings and recommendations of the study be presented to the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee at its October 2006 meeting; and
- that a copy of the memorial be transmitted to the Secretary of Health.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

According to the Department of Health (DOH), the memorial has no fiscal implications for the department.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

According to the DOH, mercury is a potent neurotoxin manifesting in a variety of neurological conditions including, among other conditions:

- tremors,
- muscle coordination,
- loss of memory,
- personality changes,
- deafness, and
- loss of vision.

Dental amalgam fillings are comprised of about 50% mercury and are a known source of mercury exposure (ATSDR Toxicological Profile for Mercury, 1999).

According to the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), the safety of dental amalgams has been questioned as a dental restorative material for many years due to their alleged health hazards. Humans can be exposed to amalgam materials such as mercury, silver, copper, and zinc via vapors, corrosion from swallowing, and direct ingestion to the blood stream via the mouth. While the mercury content of new amalgams has generally decreased in recent years (silver is the primary metal used in dental amalgam now) the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has nevertheless determined that old and removed dental amalgam can be a significant source of mercury exposure to the public.

Regarding the memorial's concern for environmental safety and acceptable measures for the disposal of dental waste, NMED notes that mercury can be easily released into the environment, and is readily transferred from soil to air and water and back again. Although many recycle and reuse programs are available and alternative mercury-free substitutes for dental restorative work are widely available, the practice of amalgam disposal via the sewage system and incineration continues.

NMED suggests that precautions must be taken to capture and dispose of mercury amalgam properly. For example, amalgam is commonly collected in traps and recycled; and amalgam scraps can also be sent offsite or passed through a trap to collect the spent resin.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

DOH notes that additional staff time would be needed for the department to meet the requirements of HM13.