

September 9, 2022

Mark Walchirk, President and CEO
Patterson Companies, Inc.
1031 Mendota Heights Rd.
St. Paul, MN

Dear Mr. Mark Walchirk,

Leading up to the annual meeting of shareholders of Patterson Companies, Inc. on September 12, 2022, we the undersigned are writing to urge Patterson Companies, Inc. to both cease production and distribution of its private label amalgam as well as amalgam from other manufacturers.

In reviewing your 2020 Corporate Responsibility statement, it declares that:

“As you review our 2020 Corporate Responsibility Report, you will learn more about our commitment to be a responsible corporate citizen by implementing greener practices in our operations, promoting diversity and inclusion and committing to continuous improvement across our organization, as well as providing resources and opportunities to our team members and our communities.”¹

While we applaud your corporate responsibility commitment to “implementing greener practices” and “promoting diversity and inclusion,” your continued production and distribution of dental amalgam flies in the face of promoting a greener environment and disproportionately impacts people of color.

Composed of 50% mercury, a well-known neurotoxicant, dental amalgam is a potential health risk for children and other vulnerable populations, and results in a significant release of mercury pollution. Once dominant in dentistry, amalgam has been surpassed in technology by non-invasive, non-polluting, tooth-friendly, and comparably-priced alternatives.

As noted in the *Journal of the National Medical Association* commentary “[Is Amalgam Toxic to Children of Color?](#)”² the risks of mercury exposure falls most heavily on children of color. Amalgam’s mercury disproportionately pollutes the lower-income and Black and Brown neighborhoods often located near remaining sources of mercury, including waste incinerators, coal-fired power plants and crematoria.

It is not just exposure to mercury in the amalgam itself, but also the life cycle of amalgam that adds to cumulative and disproportionate impacts on communities of color. These communities already face higher exposure to mercury and other harmful chemicals where they live, learn, work and play, including dietary mercury from fish, mercury in skin lightening creams, and

¹ https://s25.g4cdn.com/552046950/files/doc_financials/2020/sr/PDCO_CorpResponsibilityReport_2020.pdf

² [https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30126570/;](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30126570/)
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S002796841830258X?via%3Dihub>

crematoria. While coal-fired power plants and other sources of mercury exposure are more difficult and complex to reduce, exposure from amalgam fillings (and the impacts from the life cycle of its use) are easy to eliminate – simply by ending amalgam use.

In September 2020, the Food and Drug Administration issued a safety notice,³ recommending against amalgam use in children, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and other high-risk populations including those with neurological issues or kidney disease. Since then, two major U.S. publicly traded companies have exited amalgam – Dentsply and Envista. They recognize the legal, shareholder, customer, and public relations vulnerabilities of a publicly-traded company selling amalgam. Patterson, with annual sales of \$2.1 billion, is the same size in sales volume as Envista, and two-thirds that of Dentsply (sales, \$3b). Both Dentsply and Envista resolutely defended amalgam against our campaigns – but when FDA stepped up and issued its Safety Communication of 9/24/20, they both did an abrupt about-face, turning overnight from amalgam advocates to dropping production.

It's been over 500 days since FDA issued its safety notice. Yet Patterson's amalgam production, distribution and sales continues unabated.

Clearly, exposure to mercury from amalgam adds to the already disproportionate and cumulative exposures to mercury experienced by people of color. Pollution is higher in lower-income and minority neighborhoods near incinerators and crematoria emitting mercury vapors. Mercury vapors are readily absorbed through inhalation and contribute to total body mercury levels, exacerbating problems where people's diet includes mercury laden fish. Ending amalgam production will help reduce mercury exposure and promote a cleaner environment for all.

Research shows that elemental mercury in amalgam can be converted into the more toxic form, methylmercury, in humans and absorbed into their tissues. It can also cross the blood brain barrier and create toxic effects on the nervous system. Ending amalgam production will help reduce healthcare disparities and advance safer mercury-free fillings for all patients regardless of their race or economic status.

A 2014 Zogby poll clearly demonstrates that African-American, women, and lower-income dental patients receive less information from their dentists about amalgam's mercury content or the safer alternatives – leaving them without the information they need to make informed choice. Ending amalgam production will drive equitable policies for all patients regardless of their access to this information.

For all of the above reasons, we urge Patterson to get out of the dental mercury business. Mercury-free dental filling alternatives are cost effective, perform as well, and are available and used worldwide. Ending production and sales of dental amalgam will contribute not only to the health and wellness of people of color in the United States, but all people around the world.

³ <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/safety-communications/recommendations-about-use-dental-amalgam-certain-high-risk-populations-fda-safety-communication>

We would appreciate a response to our letter by Noon on Monday September 12th and welcome a discussion. On that same day, we are doing a press release on our concerns on the manufacturing, sale, and use of amalgam by Patterson and other companies and hope to be able to report that Patterson is phasing out the sale of amalgam, like your competitors. You can contact Michael Bender, Director, Mercury Policy Project, 802-223-9000, mercurypolicy@aol.com. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tess Dornfeld
Healthy Legacy Campaign Organizer
Clean Water Action

Martha Moriarty
Executive Director
Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota

Michael Bender
Director
Mercury Policy Project