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Norway recently announced a ban on the use of mercury, including dental amalgam, which took effect on 1 January. Sweden announced a similar ban, and dentists in Denmark will no longer be allowed to use mercury in fillings after 1 April. In a prepared statement, the Norwegian Minister of the Environment Erik Solheim said that the reason for the ban is the risk that mercury from products may constitute in the environment. "Mercury is among the most dangerous environmental toxins," he explained. "Satisfactory alternatives to mercury in products are available, and it is therefore fitting to introduce a ban."

The Swedish amalgam ban is for both environmental and health issues, according to authorities. Danish officials indicate the reason for banning amalgam is because composites have become better, and may now be used in more situations than a few years ago. Teeth will have to be mended with e.g. plastic or ceramics. "Composite fillings have now become so strong that the Danish National Board of Health says that we can expand the ban to also include amalgam fillings," said the (Danish) Minister of Health Jakob Axel Nielsen to *TV Avisen*.

Authorities note that when the ban takes effect in Denmark, the present subsidy for amalgam will be changed so that it will instead cover dental fillings of composite material. Exceptions to use amalgam may be granted for a certain period after the ban, if dentists apply for it. Since health insurance stopped paying for amalgam restorations in Sweden in 1999, the use has decreased markedly and is now estimated to be 2-5 percent of all fillings.

Most countries in Europe only advise against use of amalgam for children and pregnant women but patients' organisations believe that the rest of the population is also at risk. According to a European Union science report, amalgam poses no danger to the human nervous system.