

Choosing the Right Amalgam Separator

- Does the practice want individual chair-side separators or a central unit that will handle all the chairs?
- What type of vacuum pump services the office? Choose an amalgam separator that doesn't interfere with the practice's vacuum system. Some amalgam separators are approved only for chair-side use or for use with a particular type of vacuum pump.
- If a practice is in a building that contains many dental offices, it should check with the building manager or landlord before installing the unit, to make sure it will be compatible with the central vacuum. Potentially one central amalgam separator can be installed to serve all of the practices in the building.
- What maintenance is required? Ask whether the vendor provides regular maintenance for the unit or if it is the practice's choice. Questions include: How often does one need to dispose of accumulated waste sludge? Is the sludge collected in a canister that can be replaced or in one that must be emptied?
- If the vendor maintains the unit, find out the following: who the vendor contracts with to haul the waste away; where the contractor sends it, and what waste documentation the vendor provides as part of the service fee.
- Review the operation and maintenance manual for items one needs to keep track of while using the unit.
- Does your office use a wet vacuum or a dry vacuum system? Some amalgam separators may be compatible with one type of system, but not another. Check with your supplier for more details.
- What is the flow rate from your operatories during "peak" flow, such as when the vacuum system is flushed at the end of the day? Choose an amalgam separator that easily handles even your peak flow.
- What (if any) warranty requirements come with your vacuum system? Check the terms of your warranty agreement to ensure that amalgam separator installation work is conducted in a way that does not void the warranty provisions.
- Do you lease or own your office space? If leasing, what are the terms of your lease for maintaining and modifying vacuum, sewer line and electrical utilities?
- How many chairs are in your office? Make sure you choose a separator that can handle your current and future capacity. Also, if you operate chairside cuspidors that connect to your vacuum and drain lines, these volumes need to be included when sizing a proper separator system.
- Do you want to install an amalgam separator at chairs where restorative work is performed, or in one central location? The advantage to installing a central amalgam separator is that one unit will serve the entire office. Many separator systems for single offices are sized to handle 1-5 chairs. If chairs are used for hygiene work now, but may be used for general dentistry in the future, waste from such chairs should be routed to the separator.
- How much physical space is available for the equipment? If you are planning to remodel your office or build a new one in the near future, you should allow adequate space for amalgam separator equipment, and install such equipment at that time.
- Is there suitable access to 120V AC power for your separator installation? Some separators (utilizing pumps to remove collected wastewater) will need 120V AC power supply. Connections to existing electrical supplies should be done by a licensed electrician.
- Are dental personnel available to maintain the equipment? Some separators require more staff time than others. For example, daily decanting may be necessary with a batch settling system. If no one is available for this task, then a separator that uses a different technology may be a better solution.



The type of amalgam separator to choose depends on several factors. Many resources are available to help dental offices make an informed decision - see the questions to consider listed on this page and go to <http://pollutionprevention.sfwater.org> for more resources.

Vendors will also be able to suggest units that will best serve your office configuration.

