

The NY Times “economic scene” [column](#) has an interesting column about toxics. Current regulations are largely ineffectual. Case in point: zinc in denture cream, which turns out to be at a high enough level to cause neurological damage for some users. The product stayed on the market for years despite rising evidence, and some of it is still on the shelves:

In 2008, Dr. Sharon Nations of Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas and other researchers published a study in the journal *Neurology* that took the research one step further. It specifically tied denture cream to severe neuropathy. Dr. Hedera followed up that study with another one analyzing 11 patients with high, unexplained zinc levels. To his surprise, all 11 turned out to be heavy users of denture cream.

Yet even after those studies appeared, GlaxoSmithKline continued to sell Poligrip. The company simply inserted a small piece of paper into the product’s box containing some mild statements that barely even seemed to be warnings. The headline on the insert was, “For Best Results Start With a Small Amount.”

Perhaps even more questionable than GlaxoSmithKline’s response has been that of Procter & Gamble, the giant consumer products company that also makes Crest, Tide, Pampers and Head & Shoulders. Procter is still selling a denture cream with zinc in it. Why? The cream, Fixodent, has only about half as much zinc as Poligrip did.

Even so, it may be enough to cause problems. Some of the 11 patients in the Hedera study were Fixodent users. “I would withdraw both” — not just Poligrip but also Fixodent, Dr. Hedera says.

The problem is that watchdog agencies have had their budgets and staffing cut, while poorly conceived statutes such as the Toxic Substances Control Act have proved completely ineffectual.