



# Atlanta

## High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Drug Market Analysis

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### Preface

This assessment provides a strategic overview of the illicit drug situation in the Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), highlighting significant trends and law enforcement concerns related to the trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. The report was prepared through detailed analysis of recent law enforcement

reporting, information obtained through interviews with law enforcement and public health officials, and available statistical data. The report is designed to provide policymakers, resource planners, and law enforcement officials with a focused discussion of key drug issues and developments facing the Atlanta HIDTA region.

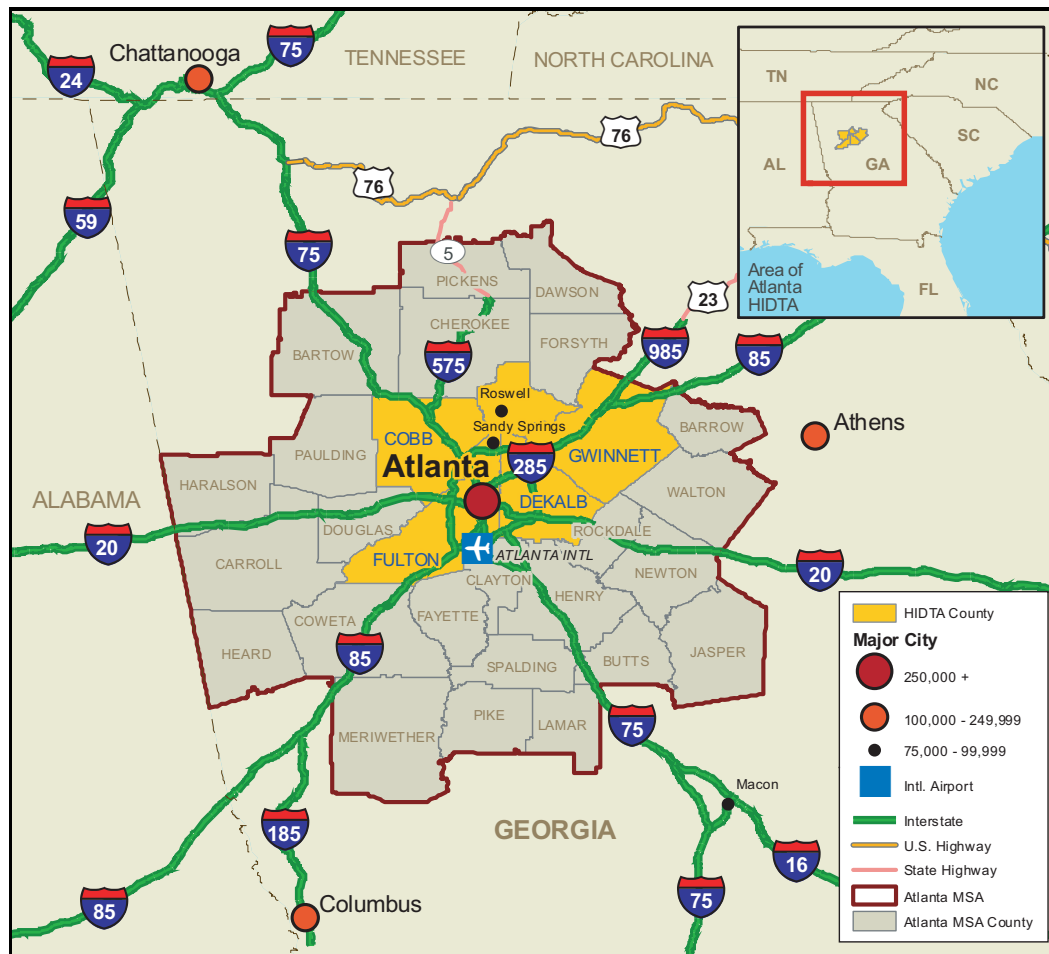


Figure 1. Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

This assessment is an outgrowth of a partnership between the NDIC and HIDTA Program for preparation of annual assessments depicting drug trafficking trends and developments in HIDTA Program areas. The report has been vetted with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.

## Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- The Atlanta HIDTA region is the principal drug distribution center for most southeastern drug markets; it is also emerging as a key distribution center for eastern and midwestern markets. As such, Atlanta has become the primary destination in the eastern United States for illicit drugs transported by Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) through the West Texas HIDTA region.
- Mexican DTOs dominate drug trafficking in the Atlanta HIDTA region. They are the primary transporters and wholesale distributors of powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, and marijuana that they obtain from other Mexican traffickers operating in California and areas near the Southwest Border.
- Local indoor cannabis cultivation is increasing in the region as growers attempt to avoid outdoor eradication and attain higher profits through the production of indoor-grown, high-potency marijuana.
- Cuban DTOs with ties to Florida-based Cuban DTOs are increasingly cultivating cannabis at indoor grow sites in the HIDTA region.

## HIDTA Overview

The Atlanta HIDTA, located in northwestern Georgia, expanded its area of responsibility in November 2006 to include Cobb and Gwinnett Counties along with DeKalb and Fulton Counties, the original HIDTA counties. These four counties have a combined population of nearly 2.7 million; the city of Atlanta accounts for over 400,000. With the addition of Cobb and Gwinnett Counties, the Atlanta HIDTA region now encompasses the four most populous counties in the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and comprises over 60 percent of the population in the Atlanta MSA.<sup>1</sup> Although the HIDTA region encompasses only

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### Drug Trafficking Organizations, Criminal Groups, and Gangs

**Drug trafficking organizations** are complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs.

**Criminal groups** operating in the United States are numerous and range from small to moderately sized, loosely knit groups that distribute one or more drugs at the retail and midlevels.

**Gangs** are defined by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations as groups or associations of three or more persons with a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, the members of which individually or collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

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four counties, this report discusses the additional Atlanta MSA counties surrounding the HIDTA region. Drug trafficking and abuse in these counties are inextricably linked to the HIDTA region.

The Atlanta HIDTA region is a major drug distribution center for Mexican DTOs. These DTOs distribute powder cocaine and marijuana from Atlanta to cities throughout the eastern United States, including New York, New York; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Trenton, New Jersey; they also distribute ice methamphetamine to southeastern markets. Additionally, Mexican DTOs are increasingly transporting powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, and marijuana from and through Atlanta to Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh, North Carolina for further distribution to eastern drug markets. Law enforcement officials report that these cities are emerging as secondary distribution centers for the Atlanta area. Mexican DTOs also use Atlanta as a distribution center for cities in the Midwest, including Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio; and St. Louis and Jefferson City, Missouri. They use the Atlanta area as a distribution center because of its

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1. The Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) includes the following 28 counties: Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, Coweta, Dawson, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Haralson, Heard, Henry, Jasper, Lamar, Meriwether, Newton, Paulding, Pickens, Pike, Rockdale, Spalding, and Walton.

central location in the Southeast as well as its well-established transportation infrastructure. Interstates 20, 75, and 85; public and private airports; and rail and bus services provide traffickers with ready access from the Southwest Border area to Atlanta and to cities throughout the eastern United States and the Midwest. In addition, the large population of the Atlanta MSA provides an extensive customer base and a degree of anonymity for Mexican drug traffickers because of the increasing Hispanic (primarily Mexican) population. Law enforcement reporting reveals that as the Mexican immigrant community has grown in the Atlanta area, so too has the presence of Mexican drug traffickers.

## Drug Threat Overview

The trafficking and abuse of cocaine and ice methamphetamine pose the most significant drug problems in the Atlanta HIDTA region. Mexican DTOs transport large quantities of powder cocaine and ice methamphetamine to the area for local distribution and for further transportation and distribution to cities throughout the eastern United States and in the Midwest. Mexican DTOs also transport large quantities of marijuana to the area for local distribution and transshipment. However, law enforcement officials report that the drug does not pose as significant a problem as cocaine and ice methamphetamine because marijuana is generally

not associated with the same level of violence and social disorder in the region as cocaine and ice methamphetamine. Reporting from Atlanta HIDTA Initiatives<sup>2</sup> indicates that approximately 446 kilograms of powder cocaine, 141 kilograms of ice methamphetamine, 1,346 kilograms of marijuana, and 212 kilograms of hydroponic marijuana were seized in 2006. (See Table 1.)

Other illicit drugs, such as diverted pharmaceuticals, MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy), and heroin, pose lesser problems to the Atlanta HIDTA region. Diverted pharmaceuticals such as alprazolam, diazepam, and hydromorphone are widely available. MDMA is readily available and distributed from Atlanta to many areas in the Southeast. Heroin availability and abuse are at stable levels.

## Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican DTOs dominate drug trafficking in the Atlanta HIDTA region; they are the most serious organizational threat to the area. These traffickers supply powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, and marijuana that they obtain from other Mexican traffickers in California and southwestern states to Atlanta for local distribution and abuse and for

**Table 1. HIDTA Initiative Drug Seizure Data, in Kilograms, 2006**

HIDTA Initiative	Powder Cocaine	Crack Cocaine	Ice Methamphetamine	Powder Methamphetamine	Marijuana	Hydroponic Marijuana	Heroin	GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate)	MDMA (in dosage units)
DeKalb	355.22	0.80	118.17	0.13	1,136.60	2.27	0.01	0.00	14,665
Domestic Highway Drug Enforcement (DHDE)	21.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.62	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Metro (Groups 1-6)	69.66	0.30	22.98	14.33	206.48	210.00	3.12	18.57	28,538
<b>Total</b>	<b>445.89</b>	<b>1.10</b>	<b>141.15</b>	<b>14.46</b>	<b>1,345.70</b>	<b>212.27</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>18.57</b>	<b>43,203</b>

Source: Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Performance Management Process Database, data run on 6/12/2007.<sup>a</sup>

a. Performance Management Process (PMP) Matrix is the process that the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) uses to assess the performance of regional High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA). The PMP Matrix lists the HIDTA's threats and needs.

2. Atlanta HIDTA funds are allocated to nine Initiatives (program areas): Metro Atlanta Task Force, DeKalb Task Force, Intelligence, Administration, Crime Lab, Prosecution, Training, Facilities, and Prevention. There are also Initiatives within each Initiative.

transshipment to and distribution in other cities in the eastern United States and the Midwest. Mexican DTOs are also transporting large quantities of powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, and marijuana to Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh for local distribution as well as for distribution to eastern drug markets. Mexican DTOs have established operational bases in Cobb and Gwinnett Counties, the two counties that were added to the Atlanta HIDTA's area of responsibility in 2006. Atlanta HIDTA Initiatives indicate that most investigations conducted in 2006 involved Mexican DTOs based in Cobb County and northern Gwinnett County. Most of the Mexican DTOs based in these two counties operate from secluded rental homes located in affluent neighborhoods. These neighborhoods provide the traffickers with added security because the homes are usually located on large parcels of property, which typically shield the DTOs from direct observation.

African American DTOs and criminal groups are significant drug traffickers in the Atlanta HIDTA region. These traffickers obtain wholesale quantities of powder cocaine from Mexican DTOs in Atlanta and other cities for distribution in the HIDTA region. African American DTOs and criminal groups distribute heroin, marijuana and, to a lesser extent, MDMA and ice methamphetamine at the retail level in Atlanta; they also convert most of the powder cocaine to crack cocaine for retail-level distribution.

Other DTOs and criminal groups, including Asian, Caucasian, Colombian, Cuban, and Dominican, operate in the HIDTA region. Asian DTOs transport and distribute wholesale-level quantities of MDMA and have introduced high-potency Canadian marijuana to the Atlanta HIDTA region; law enforcement reporting indicates that these traffickers also are distributing MDMA and Canadian marijuana from Atlanta to other cities in the Southeast. Caucasian criminal groups distribute cocaine, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), MDMA, marijuana, locally produced powder methamphetamine, ice methamphetamine, and diverted pharmaceuticals at the retail level in the region, while Colombian

criminal groups supply varying quantities of cocaine and marijuana to retail distributors. Cuban DTOs are increasingly producing and distributing hydroponic marijuana in the Atlanta HIDTA region. Dominican criminal groups distribute cocaine in the region to other criminal groups and abusers.

## **Production**

Illicit drug production in the Atlanta HIDTA region entails primarily crack cocaine conversion, cannabis cultivation, and limited powder methamphetamine production. Powder cocaine is converted to crack in the region primarily by African American DTOs and criminal groups. Most crack is converted at or near distribution sites on an as-needed basis, typically in ounce quantities.

Cannabis cultivation and marijuana production are increasing in the Atlanta area. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that the number of outdoor cannabis cultivation sites is rising as a result of the normally ideal growing conditions in the area. However, because of DEA's eradication efforts and a recent drought, some growers have switched to more sophisticated indoor hydroponic cannabis cultivation. These factors have contributed to an increase in indoor cultivation reported by law enforcement, evidenced by a 215 percent increase in indoor plant eradication from 2002 through 2006 in Georgia. (See [Table 2 on page 5.](#)) Additionally, law enforcement officials seized more than 1,500 cannabis plants from over 50 indoor grow sites between February and March 2007; most of these grow sites were located at residences in the Atlanta area. The cannabis plants, marijuana, and other contraband seized at the 50 sites were valued at over \$10 million. These grow sites were strikingly similar in terms of equipment and procedures. For example, the basements in most of the residences incorporated special lighting, water-recycling systems, modified ventilation systems, and advanced hydroponic systems. Most of the grow houses were operated by Cuban DTOs with ties to Florida-based Cuban DTOs. Moreover, law enforcement officials have linked at least one grow site in Atlanta to a grow site operating in North Carolina.

**Table 2. Number of Cannabis Plants Eradicated in Georgia at Indoor and Outdoor Grow Sites 2002–2006**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Indoor Plants</b>	511	223	616	642	1,610
<b>Outdoor Plants</b>	75,259	46,762	18,122	27,067	65,178
<b>Total Plants</b>	<b>75,770<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>46,985</b>	<b>18,738</b>	<b>27,709</b>	<b>66,788</b>

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

a. The Atlanta HIDTA reports that fluctuations in the number of cannabis plants eradicated each year is sometimes the result of available assets. Nonetheless, the total number of cannabis plants eradicated in Georgia in 2002 was unusually high.

The rise in the local cultivation of cannabis, particularly hydroponically grown cannabis, is driven by the growing popularity of—and increasing demand for—higher-potency marijuana in the region. According to Atlanta HIDTA officials, this growing demand may be linked partially to the hip-hop music industry in the area, which often glamorizes the use of this drug in song lyrics and lifestyles.

Powder methamphetamine production within the area is limited; most methamphetamine production in Georgia takes place outside the

HIDTA region. (See Table 3.) The number of methamphetamine laboratories seized in the HIDTA region decreased from 13 in 2005 to 5 in 2006. Less than 2 ounces of methamphetamine per production cycle can be produced in most methamphetamine laboratories in the area; however, one superlab was seized in Barrow County in 2006.<sup>3</sup> According to law enforcement officials, decreased local powder methamphetamine production has resulted from an influx of Mexican ice methamphetamine into the area as well as state restrictions on the purchase of pseudoephedrine and other precursor chemicals used in methamphetamine production.

## Transportation

The city of Atlanta is intersected by three major interstate highways: Interstates 20, 75, and 85. Drug traffickers use these interstates to transport illicit drugs directly to the Atlanta HIDTA region and from the region to cities throughout Georgia as well as Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Moreover, Mexican DTOs use I-20 to transport illicit drugs to Atlanta from southwestern drug markets. In fact, Atlanta has become the primary destination in the eastern United States for illicit drugs transported

**Table 3. Number of Methamphetamine Laboratories Seized in Georgia, 2001–2006**

Area	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<b>Atlanta HIDTA Region</b> (Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, Gwinnett Counties)	4	3	5	6	13	5
<b>Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area</b> (24 of the 28 counties: Barrow, Bartow, Butts, Carroll, Cherokee, Clayton, Coweta, Dawson, Douglas, Fayette, Forsyth, Haralson, Heard, Henry, Jasper, Lamar, Meriwether, Newton, Paulding, Pickens, Pike, Rockdale, Spalding, and Walton)	8	30	35	29	39	24
<b>Georgia</b> (remaining 31 counties)	33	57	138	178	144	74
<b>Total for All Counties</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>103</b>

Source: National Seizure System, data run on 3/19/2007.

3. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) defines a superlab as a clandestine laboratory in which at least 10 pounds of methamphetamine per production cycle can be produced.

**Table 4. Georgia State Highway Patrol Drug and Currency Seizures Atlanta HIDTA Region, 2006**

Seized Item	Amount
Cocaine	31.54 kilograms
Marijuana	11.31 kilograms
Methamphetamine	1.34 kilograms
U.S. Currency	\$1,774,678

Source: Georgia State Highway Patrol.

by Mexican DTOs through the West Texas HIDTA region.<sup>4</sup> In 2006 the Georgia State Highway Patrol seized kilogram quantities of illicit drugs and more than \$1.7 million in U.S. currency from traffickers using roadways in the Atlanta HIDTA. (See Table 4.)

Traffickers use private and commercial vehicles most often to transport illicit drugs; they also use parcel delivery services; couriers on buses, trains, and commercial aircraft; and, to a lesser extent, private aircraft. They make extensive use of hidden compartments in vehicles and often commingle drugs with otherwise legitimate shipments. For instance, law enforcement officials have detected Mexican DTOs transporting tractor-trailer loads of fresh produce commingled with illicit drugs to the state farmers’ market in southern Atlanta.

## Distribution

The Atlanta HIDTA region is a principal drug distribution center for most of the southeastern United States; law enforcement agencies throughout the Southeast routinely identify Atlanta as the primary source for methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana sold in their jurisdictions. The region is also emerging as a key drug distribution center for drug markets in eastern states, including New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, and for some markets in midwestern states, including Illinois and Missouri. Additionally, Mexican DTOs operating in Atlanta are extending their trafficking

**Table 5. Retail-Level Drug Distributors in the Atlanta HIDTA Region**

Distributors	Drug(s) Distributed
African American	Powder and crack cocaine, heroin, MDMA, marijuana, and ice methamphetamine
Asian	High-potency marijuana and MDMA
Caucasian	Powder cocaine, GHB, MDMA, marijuana, locally produced methamphetamine, ice methamphetamine, and diverted pharmaceuticals
Colombian	Powder cocaine and marijuana
Cuban	High-potency marijuana
Dominican	Powder cocaine
Hispanic	Powder cocaine and ice methamphetamine

Source: Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

networks by using Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh as secondary distribution centers.

Mexican DTOs are the primary wholesale distributors of cocaine, marijuana, and ice methamphetamine in the Atlanta HIDTA region. These DTOs frequently use stash houses to store illicit drugs while awaiting further distribution. Further, Mexican DTOs use a variety of electronic communication devices, coded text messages on cell phones, and instant messages on computers to facilitate their drug distribution operations.

DTOs and criminal groups of various nationalities and ethnicities sell illicit drugs at the retail level in the area (see Table 5), and their methods of operation change little from year to year. Retail-level drug distribution occurs throughout most of the Atlanta HIDTA region, with specific drug markets located in certain areas of the city. For example, DTOs and criminal groups typically distribute ice methamphetamine and crack cocaine in southeastern Atlanta; GHB, methamphetamine, MDMA, and diverted pharmaceutical drugs in Midtown Atlanta; powder cocaine and MDMA in Buckhead; and heroin in Vine City and an area in northwestern

4. Interstates 10 and 20 link Atlanta directly to the two primary transshipment centers—El Paso and Midland/Odessa—in the West Texas HIDTA, making the Atlanta HIDTA easily accessible to Mexican DTOs that operate from West Texas.

Atlanta known as the Bluff. Retail-level drug distribution occurs at open-air markets, housing projects, private homes and businesses, and prearranged meeting sites such as parking lots.

## Drug-Related Crime

The distribution and abuse of illicit drugs, primarily crack cocaine and ice methamphetamine, in the HIDTA region are often associated with violent crimes and property crimes. Law enforcement officials frequently note that crack cocaine and ice methamphetamine distributors commonly commit violent crimes such as assaults, home invasions, and shootings to protect and expand their drug operations. Moreover, 17 of 28 law enforcement agencies in the Atlanta HIDTA region that responded to the NDIC National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2006 report that crack cocaine is the drug that most contributes to violent crime in their jurisdictions, and 15 of the 28 report that methamphetamine is the drug that most contributes to property crime.

Law enforcement officials report that the current rate of violence among street-level crack cocaine distributors has surpassed 2006 levels, particularly

in DeKalb County, largely as a result of disputes between Atlanta-based distributors and distributors from New Orleans, Louisiana, over drug territory. The violence began when crack distributors from New Orleans, displaced by Hurricane Katrina, relocated to Atlanta and began to compete with local Atlanta crack dealers for drug territory. Law enforcement officials expected this violence to decline as drug distributors from New Orleans returned home after hurricane recovery efforts. However, many former New Orleans-based traffickers have elected to stay and expand operations in the area; as such, not only has the violence between these distributors not subsided, it has increased.

## Abuse

Cocaine is the primary drug of abuse identified in drug treatment admissions in the Atlanta MSA, accounting for 34 percent of all admissions in state fiscal year (SFY) 2006 (3,047 of 8,966).<sup>5</sup> The number of cocaine admissions has fluctuated since SFY2002, but has decreased overall. This decrease is quite likely a result of some stimulant abusers switching from cocaine to methamphetamine. Marijuana admissions accounted for the next highest

**Table 6. Number of Primary Drug Treatment Admissions in the Atlanta Metropolitan Statistical Area, SFY2002–SFY2006<sup>a</sup>**

Primary Drug at Admission	SFY02	SFY03	SFY04	SFY05	SFY06
<b>Cocaine (Powder and Crack)</b>	3,326	2,867	2,942	2,888	3,047
<b>Heroin/Morphine</b>	461	388	421	350	330
<b>Marijuana/Hashish</b>	1,804	1,860	2,110	2,231	2,388
<b>Methamphetamine/Speed</b>	384	618	1,072	1,362	1,299
<b>All Other Substances, Excluding Alcohol</b>	2,533	1,879	1,690	1,909	1,902
<b>Total Admissions</b>	<b>8,508</b>	<b>7,612</b>	<b>8,235</b>	<b>8,740</b>	<b>8,966</b>

Source: Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases.<sup>b</sup>

a. Figures in this table represent the number of consumers who had at least one admission during the state fiscal year in which the primary “substance problem at admission” was the substance shown. A consumer is counted only once per fiscal year per primary substance problem regardless of the number of admissions for that problem. Note that a consumer may be counted in more than one category per state fiscal year because the consumer may have had separate admissions for different primary substances.

b. This table includes only admissions to services funded or operated by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases and does not include admissions to services of any other providers, public or private.

5. The state fiscal year runs from July through June.

number of treatment admissions; the number of admissions increased from 1,804 in SFY2002 to 2,388 in SFY2006. This increase was most likely the result of an increase in the availability of high-potency marijuana in the area. Methamphetamine-related treatment admissions rose overall from 384 in SFY2002 to 1,299 in SFY2006 but declined between SFY2005 and SFY2006. African Americans in Atlanta are most likely to abuse crack cocaine, and Caucasians are most likely to abuse methamphetamine; however, indicators suggest a growing level of methamphetamine abuse among African Americans. (See Table 6 on page 7.)

## Illicit Finance

As the region's principal drug traffickers, Mexican DTOs are a primary concern among law enforcement officials with respect to drug money laundering. Mexican DTOs transport illicit drug proceeds primarily in bulk from the region to locations at or near the U.S.–Mexico border. The proceeds are then generally commingled with illicit drug proceeds generated in other areas and smuggled into Mexico for eventual repatriation. Law enforcement officials report that Mexican DTOs generally transport bulk cash shipments in personal and commercial vehicles equipped with hidden compartments. Further, law enforcement reporting reveals that Mexican DTOs are increasingly using cloned vehicles, such as utility, delivery and, occasionally, law enforcement vehicles, to transport bulk cash. Mexican DTOs also use money remittance services, including national firms as well as small businesses in Hispanic communities, to wire illicit proceeds from Atlanta. Additionally, Mexican DTOs periodically employ Colombian money brokers to assist them in laundering their drug proceeds. Colombian money brokers operating in the HIDTA region generally launder illicit funds using electronic wire remittance services and the Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE). (See text box.)

Other DTOs and criminal groups operating in the Atlanta HIDTA region launder illicit drug proceeds through bulk cash transport and money remittance services, but they also employ other money laundering typologies, including structuring

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### Black Market Peso Exchange

The BMPE system originated in the 1960s when the Colombian government banned the U.S. dollar, intending to increase the value of the Colombian peso and boost the Colombian economy. The government also imposed high tariffs on imported U.S. goods, hoping to increase the demand for Colombian-produced goods. However, this situation created a black market for Colombian merchants seeking U.S. goods and cheaper U.S. dollars. Those merchants possessed Colombian pesos in Colombia but wanted cheaper U.S. dollars (purchased under official exchange rates) in the United States to purchase goods to sell on the black market. Colombian traffickers had U.S. dollars in the United States—from the sale of illicit drugs—but needed Colombian pesos in Colombia. Consequently, peso brokers began to facilitate the transfer of U.S. drug dollars to Colombian merchants, and business agreements were forged, allowing those Colombian merchants to purchase U.S. dollars from traffickers in exchange for Colombian pesos. Although the ban on possession of U.S. dollars was later lifted, the black market system became ingrained in the Colombian economy, and Colombian drug traffickers continue to rely on this system to launder their U.S. drug proceeds.

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Source: Department of Homeland Security Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

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bank deposits and money order purchases; commingling drug proceeds with revenue generated by legitimate businesses; using check-cashing and currency exchange businesses; purchasing consumer goods and vehicles, often in another person's name; and purchasing or leasing businesses such as restaurants, bars, used car lots, landscaping businesses, and video and convenience stores. DTOs and criminal groups frequently use these businesses as bases of operation for drug storage and distribution. Reporting from Atlanta HIDTA Initiatives indicates that approximately \$3.3 million in U.S. currency and \$7.9 million in noncash assets such as vehicles, electronics, and jewelry were seized in 2006.



## Outlook

The control that Mexican DTOs exert over drug trafficking in the Atlanta HIDTA region will increase, and these DTOs will continue to use the area to further expand into new markets throughout the eastern United States. Their operations will further envelop cities close to Atlanta, such as Charlotte, Greensboro and Raleigh, rendering the cities secondary distribution centers for markets throughout the Southeast and Northeast.

Atlanta will be increasingly used by Mexican DTOs as a money consolidation point for illicit drug proceeds generated in East Coast drug markets. Consolidated funds will most likely be transported in bulk to Mexico by personal and commercial vehicles, including cloned vehicles. Mexican DTOs may also increase their reliance on Colombian money brokers to assist in laundering consolidated drug proceeds.

Powder methamphetamine production levels will remain low in the Atlanta HIDTA region, given the effectiveness of precursor chemical control regulations enacted in Georgia and surrounding states. However, Mexican DTOs will continue to supplant low supplies of locally produced methamphetamine with Mexican ice methamphetamine.

Indoor cannabis cultivation, particularly at hydroponic grow sites in the Atlanta HIDTA region, will quite likely increase over the next year. Cuban DTO involvement in the cultivation of cannabis and production of high-potency marijuana in the region will quite likely also increase. The rising demand for high-potency marijuana may lead other traffickers in the region to become involved with indoor cannabis cultivation in an effort to capitalize on the area's growing marijuana trade.

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## Sources

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### Local, State, and Regional

Atlanta Police Department  
DeKalb County Police Department  
Georgia Department of Human Resources  
    Division of Mental Health  
        Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases  
Georgia State Highway Patrol  
Gwinnett County Police Department  
Trenton, New Jersey, Police Department

### Federal

Executive Office of the President  
    Office of National Drug Control Policy  
        High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas  
            Atlanta  
            Central Florida  
            Southwest Border  
            West Texas Region  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
    U.S. Census Bureau  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
    National Institutes of Health  
        National Institute on Drug Abuse  
            Community Epidemiology Work Group  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
    Federal Law Enforcement Training Center  
U.S. Department of Justice  
    Drug Enforcement Administration  
        Atlanta Field Division  
        Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program  
        El Paso Intelligence Center  
        National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
    Northern District of Georgia



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