



Drug Market Analysis

2008

Northwest

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



**NATIONAL DRUG INTELLIGENCE CENTER
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**





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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 coordinated with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.



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PREFACE

This assessment provides a strategic overview of the illicit drug situation in the Northwest 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 Northwest HIDTA.



Figure 1. Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.



STRATEGIC DRUG THREAT DEVELOPMENTS

- Local powder methamphetamine production, which has been declining for the past several years, further decreased over the past year, largely the result of stricter regulations on the sale of precursor and essential chemicals used in methamphetamine production, successful law enforcement efforts, and public awareness campaigns on the adverse health effects of methamphetamine abuse that focus on demand. Nonetheless, limited local methamphetamine production still occurs in the region, primarily in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties, jeopardizing the safety of citizens, adversely affecting the environment, and straining law enforcement resources in the region.
- Mexican ice methamphetamine poses the most significant drug threat to the Northwest HIDTA region. Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and criminal groups are the dominant transporters and wholesale distributors of the drug in the HIDTA region.¹
- Cocaine availability and abuse are increasing in the HIDTA region. Part of this increase is attributed to fluctuations in availability and the misconception that cocaine is a safer alternative to methamphetamine.
- Canada-based Vietnamese criminal groups are increasingly establishing cannabis cultivation operations in Washington to reduce costs associated with the transportation of high-potency marijuana from Canada and to minimize the risk of law enforcement interdiction.

1. For the purposes of this report, ice methamphetamine refers to methamphetamine that has been crystallized from powder methamphetamine.

HIDTA OVERVIEW

The Northwest HIDTA was established in 1997 to counter the threat posed by the high volume of drugs transported throughout the area and smuggled across the U.S.–Canada border. The region encompasses 14 counties in Washington—Benton, Clark, Cowlitz, Franklin, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, Whatcom, and Yakima. The proximity of the HIDTA region to Canada and the direct access to drug sources in Mexico through a vast transportation infrastructure—numerous freeways, highways, airports, waterways, and railways—contribute to the threat of cross-border smuggling. For instance, Interstate 5, a major north-south corridor, provides traffickers direct access to the area from the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa ports of entry (POEs) at the U.S.–Mexico border and the Blaine POE located in Washington at the U.S.–Canada border.

DRUG THREAT OVERVIEW

The Northwest HIDTA region is adversely affected by the trafficking and abuse of numerous drugs; however, the threat posed by methamphetamine exceeds that of all others. In fact, of the 42 state and local law enforcement agencies in the Northwest HIDTA region that responded to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2007, 40 reported that methamphetamine is the greatest drug threat in their area. Moreover, 38 respondents reported that methamphetamine is the drug that most contributes to violent crime in their areas and 41 respondents reported the same for property crime.

Mexican ice methamphetamine is the predominant type of methamphetamine available in the region; locally produced methamphetamine is available, but only to a limited extent because of significant declines in local production. Mexican DTOs are the primary producers, transporters, and wholesale distributors of ice methamphetamine that they acquire from production facilities in Mexico and conversion laboratories in California.

They have generally supplied sufficient quantities of the drug to meet demand, even in the face of decreased local methamphetamine production. However, in 2007, the availability and purity of Mexican methamphetamine temporarily decreased in some areas of the HIDTA region, particularly at the midlevel and retail level. Restrictions enacted by the government of Mexico on the importation and legitimate distribution of precursor chemicals in Mexico during 2005 have reportedly curtailed methamphetamine production in the country, leading to recent decreases in the availability of Mexican ice methamphetamine throughout the region. Decreased availability has caused traffickers to “cut” the drug to stretch supplies in order to maintain profitability. Dimethylsulfone (DMSO₂), also known as methylsulfonylmethane (MSM), is extensively used by traffickers in the region to cut methamphetamine because it is chemically suited for methamphetamine manufacturing and is legally obtainable from feed stores.

Cannabis cultivation and marijuana production operations are pervasive throughout the HIDTA region. Overall, the entire state of Washington is one of the top-producing cannabis cultivation areas in the nation and is considered by federal counterdrug officials as an “M7” state.² (See Table 1.) A considerable portion of the cannabis cultivation that occurs in Washington takes place in the Northwest HIDTA region (see Table 3 on page 5). Moreover, most indoor cannabis cultivation in Washington occurs at sites located within the HIDTA region (see Table 4 on page 6). Additionally, law enforcement reporting reveals that Vietnamese DTOs are increasingly establishing sophisticated indoor growing operations in the area.

2. M7 states are identified by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) as the seven primary cannabis cultivation and marijuana production states in the nation; they consist of California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia.

Table 1. Cannabis Plants Eradicated in M7 States, 2007

States	Total Plants
California	4,951,976
Kentucky	492,615
Washington	295,573
Oregon	277,766
Tennessee	178,322
Hawaii	139,089
West Virginia	44,732

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program, June 2008.

Cocaine is readily available in the HIDTA region; powder cocaine continues to be more available than crack cocaine. According to the NDTs 2007, 33 of 42 state and local law enforcement respondents in the region reported that powder cocaine availability was moderate to high in their jurisdictions. Moreover, some law enforcement officials report that some new abusers possibly try powder cocaine, considering it a purer drug. Crack cocaine is readily available in larger urban areas such as Seattle, Spokane, and Tacoma.

The abuse of Mexican black tar heroin is also a threat in Seattle. The number of heroin-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in King County, which encompasses Seattle, is significantly higher than in other counties of the region, according to data from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse. (See Table 8 on page 10.)

Other dangerous drugs (ODDs) and diverted pharmaceuticals are a growing concern to law enforcement in the HIDTA region. The abuse of MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine, commonly known as ecstasy) and some prescription drugs, such as OxyContin (oxycodone), are escalating in areas of the region.



DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are the dominant illicit drug producers, transporters, and wholesale distributors in the HIDTA region. Their influence in the area is unrivaled and presents law enforcement with numerous challenges. Members of Mexican DTOs and criminal groups, which tend to be insular and family-based, easily blend with the region's sizable Hispanic population. Mexican traffickers in the HIDTA region generally obtain illicit drugs from Mexican DTOs operating in Mexico, California, and southwestern states. They supply the drugs to distributors throughout the area. Additionally, law enforcement officials report that some members of Mexican DTOs and criminal groups also exploit Native American reservations in the region by befriending and living with female tribal members in order to establish drug distribution networks on tribal lands.

Asian DTOs and criminal groups, predominantly Vietnamese criminal groups, operate throughout the Northwest HIDTA region; they are primarily involved in indoor cannabis cultivation and high-potency marijuana production. These traffickers often attempt to shield themselves from law enforcement detection by employing other criminal groups, such as Indo-Canadian drug transportation organizations, to conduct some high-risk operations on their behalf, particularly cross-border smuggling. Asian DTOs and criminal groups routinely contract with Indo-Canadian transporters to smuggle Canadian high-potency marijuana and MDMA into the United States and cocaine and bulk cash into Canada through Washington POEs. According to law enforcement officials, the transporters are prone to violence and are adept at changing their modes of operation to avoid law enforcement detection.

Street gangs distribute a variety of illicit drugs throughout the Northwest HIDTA region—particularly at the retail level. For example, African American street gangs dominate retail drug distribution in parts of the Puget Sound area (see Figure 1 on page 1), while Hispanic street gangs control such distribution in Spokane. Regardless of which street gang dominates a particular market, the large number of street gang members in the region—as well as their willingness to violently defend their drug distribution areas—renders street gangs a significant threat to the region and a rising concern to law enforcement.

Members of outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs), particularly some members of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC), transport illicit drugs into the region, principally from Canada, and distribute them in various drug markets. For instance, law enforcement officials report that some HAMC members smuggle significant quantities of Canadian high-potency marijuana and MDMA into the region.

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 level and midlevel.

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.

PRODUCTION

Outdoor cannabis cultivation and marijuana production operations are common throughout the HIDTA region. Outdoor cannabis cultivation and eradication levels in Washington were relatively high during 2007 (see Table 2). A significant portion of the cannabis eradicated from outdoor sites in Washington during the year was taken from sites located within the HIDTA region (see Table 3). Outdoor cannabis cultivation in the HIDTA region is largely controlled by Mexican DTOs and criminal groups. Outdoor cultivation operations are commonly located on public lands, adversely affecting national parks, forests, and the mountain areas in the region. Additionally, law enforcement officials report that outdoor cannabis grow operations in the Yakima Valley and Tri-Cities³ areas of the region are usually situated in extremely remote locations with limited access. The late summer climate and terrain of the Yakima Valley and Tri-Cities areas are conducive to large-scale outdoor cannabis grow operations. As such, Mexican DTOs and criminal groups exploit these areas to expand their cultivation operations.

Table 2. Cannabis Plants Eradicated From Outdoor Grow Sites in M7 States, 2007

States	Plants
California	4,791,838
Kentucky	490,029
Oregon	261,485
Washington	240,078
Tennessee	177,685
Hawaii	131,355
West Virginia	43,090

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program, June 2008.

3. The Tri-Cities area comprises Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick.

Table 3. Cannabis Plants Eradicated From Outdoor Grow Sites, by Northwest HIDTA Counties and the State of Washington 2005–2007

County	2005	2006	2007
Benton	3,527	4,163	8,966
Clark	685	253	6,664
Cowlitz	62	110	0
Franklin	8,386	15,382	23,905
King	32	178	549
Kitsap	477	203	119
Lewis	105	766	2,980
Pierce	0	136	1,092
Skagit	971	243	74
Snohomish	215	245	18
Spokane	457	99	39
Thurston	2,173	168	131
Whatcom	37	138	32
Yakima	14,788	46,825	39,945
HIDTA Total	31,915	68,909	84,514
State Total	101,882	100,765	241,097

Source: Northwest HIDTA, June 2008.

Indoor cannabis cultivation is prevalent throughout the HIDTA region. (See Table 4 on page 6.) In fact, eradication data reveal that most indoor cannabis cultivation in Washington, a leading M7 state for indoor cultivation, occurs within the HIDTA region. Moreover, eradication from indoor cannabis cultivation sites in Washington and the HIDTA region has steadily increased over the past several years. Within the region, indoor cannabis cultivation is most prevalent in the Puget Sound and Spokane areas. Caucasian criminal groups, Caucasian independent producers, and Vietnamese DTOs are the primary cultivators of indoor cannabis throughout the region.

Increasing demand for high-potency marijuana within and outside the region has prompted a number of Canada-based Asian DTOs and criminal



Table 4. Cannabis Plants Eradicated From Indoor Grow Sites, Northwest HIDTA Counties and the State of Washington, 2005–2007

County	2005	2006	2007
Benton	165	0	0
Clark	1,042	1,421	4,908
Cowlitz	58	47	124
Franklin	0	0	0
King	17,103	24,077	26,359
Kitsap	949	1,545	379
Lewis	941	312	1,941
Pierce	2,005	2,077	7,836
Skagit	988	484	481
Snohomish	1,562	1,996	5,185
Spokane	2,358	2,171	1,809
Thurston	1,039	441	858
Whatcom	338	2,305	1,026
Yakima	1,418	1,763	284
HIDTA Total	29,966	38,639	51,190
State Total	34,276	43,641	55,514

Source: Northwest HIDTA, June 2008.

groups, primarily Vietnamese, to establish indoor cultivation operations in the area. In doing so, Asian traffickers seek to capitalize on rising demand for high-potency marijuana in the United States while minimizing their exposure to law enforcement officials at the U.S.–Canada border, including seizure of high-potency Canadian marijuana shipments. Additionally, some Vietnamese criminal groups operate garden supply shops in the area to help Vietnamese cannabis cultivators and other growers establish and maintain indoor grow operations. Shop operators typically stock supplies that they acquire from associates in Canada.

Kent Garden Shop Owner Pleads Guilty

On February 8, 2007, a female Canadian citizen of Vietnamese descent pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Seattle to conspiracy to manufacture marijuana and money laundering. This individual is a co-owner of Kent Distributor, Inc, also known as Kent Garden Supplies, in Kent, Washington. In the plea agreement, this person admitted that she provided advice to cultivators on how to grow cannabis, find suitable houses for grow operations, avoid law enforcement detection, and avoid forfeiture of assets to the government if detected. She also admitted that she loaned the company van for establishing grow sites and allowed waste from these grows to be placed in the company Dumpster. She and her husband also operated a cannabis grow at a rental home in Renton. Officers raided the home and found 658 plants.

Source: U.S. Attorney, Western District of Washington.

Methamphetamine production in the Northwest HIDTA region has steadily declined over the past several years as a result of sustained law enforcement interdiction efforts, enhanced precursor chemical controls, increased public awareness campaigns, and rising availability of Mexican ice methamphetamine. However, local production persists; some laboratory operators—usually Caucasian independent producers—continue to operate small-capacity methamphetamine laboratories in rural areas, producing ounce quantities of the drug. These producers typically use anhydrous ammonia (a common crop fertilizer) to produce methamphetamine; the chemical is widely available throughout the region, as it is commonly used for legitimate agricultural purposes. National Seizure System (NSS) data reveal that although laboratory-related seizures in the region have decreased significantly, the number of seizures is still relatively high, especially in Pierce County. (See Table 5 on page 7.)

Table 5. Methamphetamine Laboratory Seizures, Northwest HIDTA Counties and the State of Washington, 2005–2007

County	2005	2006	2007
Benton	6	1	0
Clark	3	3	1
Cowlitz	1	3	3
Franklin	2	0	0
King	32	6	5
Kitsap	6	1	2
Lewis	2	4	0
Pierce	82	32	37
Skagit	3	2	1
Snohomish	27	6	3
Spokane	6	4	3
Thurston	8	0	1
Whatcom	2	3	0
Yakima	1	3	1
HIDTA Total	181	68	57
State Total	211	81	62

Source: National Seizure System, June 11, 2008.

TRANSPORTATION

The Northwest HIDTA region’s proximity to illicit drug source areas and a multifaceted transportation infrastructure enable traffickers to transport significant quantities of illicit drugs into the area. Major highways in the region, such as I-5, provide traffickers direct access to drug sources in California, Mexico, and Canada. Traffickers also exploit Washington’s 430-mile border with Canada to smuggle drugs. Fifteen POEs are located along the U.S.–Canada border through which traffickers transport illicit drugs by vehicle. A significant portion of the border is a vast, dense forest that provides excellent cover for trafficking operations. Several waterways are also located at the border through which traffickers smuggle illicit drugs into

the region. In traversing forestlands, traffickers often use all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), snowmobiles, and couriers with backpacks; they generally use small boats and kayaks to negotiate waterways.

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are the dominant transporters of powder cocaine and Mexican marijuana, black tar heroin, and ice methamphetamine to and through the HIDTA region. These groups obtain illicit drugs from other Mexican DTOs and often coordinate receipt of drug shipments through family members or associates in Mexico, California, or other Southwest Border states. Mexican traffickers generally transport illicit drugs to the region in private and commercial vehicles, traveling on I-5. Their vehicles are typically equipped with false compartments that range, in terms of sophistication, from false gas tanks and hollowed-out tire wells to electronically coded access hatches.

Vietnamese DTOs and criminal groups transport high-potency Canadian marijuana and MDMA to the region, particularly to the Puget Sound area. They often employ Indo-Canadian criminal groups to transport the drugs across the U.S.–Canada border through land POEs, especially the Blaine POE. (See Figure 1 on page 1.) These traffickers capitalize on the high volume of traffic at POEs that limits close inspection of vehicles and cargo. (See Table 6 on page 8.) Additionally, some Canada-based traffickers smuggle precursor chemicals used in methamphetamine production, such as pseudoephedrine and ephedrine, from Canada into Washington for use at laboratories in the region and elsewhere. However, there is no large-scale smuggling of precursor chemicals into the HIDTA region, according to the Northwest HIDTA.

Some DTOs and criminal groups operating in the HIDTA region also use maritime and air cargo to move illicit drugs to the region, according to law enforcement reporting. However, the extent to which such modalities are used by traffickers is relatively unknown because of the inherent difficulty law enforcement officials experience in inspecting the large volume of maritime and air cargo that passes through seaports and airports



Table 6. Inbound Crossings Through Washington Land POEs, 2006*

POE	Private Vehicles	Trucks	Loaded Containers	Pedestrians	Buses	Trains
Anacortes	26,340	894	0	14,769	14	0
Blaine	2,596,970	365,959	347,275	6,699	12,776	1,547
Boundary	75,044	36	7,202	106	18	262
Danville	59,625	101	7	557	42	0
Ferry	9,576	220	9	76	9	0
Friday Harbor	2,920	0	0	2,685	0	0
Frontier	35,949	20,385	14,594	23	123	0
Laurier	53,439	11,320	16,629	188	71	227
Lynden	477,699	55,490	26,788	1,080	20	0
Metaline Falls	24,113	9,498	3,630	100	61	0
Nighthawk	6,421	11	0	30	0	0
Oroville	228,646	44,746	38,706	863	641	0
Point Roberts	782,608	17,938	0	14,935	884	0
Port Angeles	59,438	1,818	0	0	132	0
Sumas	627,638	153,889	135,029	28,963	2,302	1,127
Total	5,066,426	682,305	589,869	71,074	17,093	3,163

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation.

* The latest year for which such data are available.

in Washington. For instance, the Port of Seattle alone handled approximately 14,584,816 metric tons (MT) of containerized cargo during 2007, while roughly 319,013 MT of air cargo passed through the Seattle International Airport; approximately 31,296,628 passengers also passed through the airport in 2007.

DISTRIBUTION

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups dominate wholesale drug distribution in the Northwest HIDTA region; they supply wholesale quantities of powder cocaine, commercial-grade Mexican marijuana, Mexican black tar heroin, and Mexican ice methamphetamine to various distributors, including other Mexican criminal groups, independent dealers, street gangs, and OMGs for midlevel and retail-level distribution.

Arrests Target Methamphetamine Trafficking Ring

Twenty-two members of a Mexico-based DTO were arrested in early April 2008 and charged with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine and conspiracy to engage in money laundering. The DTO allegedly distributed hundreds of pounds of ice methamphetamine in Washington each month that its members manufactured in Michoacán, Mexico, and smuggled to the state.

Source: U.S. Attorney, Western District of Washington.

Canada-based Vietnamese DTOs and criminal groups are the primary wholesale distributors of high-potency Canadian marijuana and MDMA in the region. These traffickers supply these drugs to other local Asian criminal groups, street gangs,

and OMGs for retail distribution, primarily within the Puget Sound area. Canada-based Vietnamese DTOs and criminal groups also use the region as a key transshipment center for large quantities of high-potency Canadian marijuana and MDMA destined for drug markets throughout the country.

Street gangs dominate retail-level drug distribution throughout the Northwest HIDTA region. In Seattle, African American gangs, such as Rolling 60's and Rolling 90's, Hispanic street gangs including Sureños 13 gang sects, and Asian street gangs such as Young Seattle Boyz, control much of the retail-level drug distribution that takes place in the city. In the Yakima area, Hispanic street gangs, including Baby Gangster Sureños and East Side Sureños, actively distribute retail quantities of most illicit drugs. In Spokane, African American street gangs, such as Insane Gangster Crips, Rolling 60's, Elm Street Piru, and Southside Avenue Piru as well as Sureños and Norteños gang sects, engage in retail drug distribution. Various other criminal groups and OMGs also engage in retail-level distribution in the region, but to a lesser extent.

Retail-level distributors use cell phones to facilitate drug distribution in the HIDTA region. Distributors also use pagers to negotiate transactions and prearrange meetings with customers. Traffickers prefer to conduct business conversations on phones with point-to-point capabilities, believing that these communications are difficult for law enforcement to intercept. Distributors also use text messaging to communicate and arrange meetings. They typically use a cell phone for a limited time before switching to a new phone with a new number to further reduce the possibility of having calls monitored.

DRUG-RELATED CRIME

A large percentage of the property crime and violent crime that occurs within the region is associated with the trafficking and abuse of drugs, particularly methamphetamine. According to data from the NDTs 2007, 41 of the 42 respondents to the survey indicated that methamphetamine was the drug that contributed most to property crime in their jurisdictions and 38 identified methamphetamine as the drug that contributed most to violent crime. Methamphetamine abusers in the region commit property crimes, such as mail theft, forgery, and identity theft, to acquire funds to purchase the drug; methamphetamine distributors also commit such crimes to fund their operations. Methamphetamine abusers have also been implicated in incidents of domestic violence and child neglect. For example, law enforcement officials report that children of methamphetamine abusers often live in unsanitary conditions and are sometimes exposed to the toxic chemicals used in the methamphetamine production, resulting in long-term health problems.

ABUSE

Drug-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in the region are at relatively high levels and, in most instances, are rising. According to data from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, the number of methamphetamine-related treatment admissions has steadily increased over the past few years, from 5,913 in 2004 to 7,687 in 2006, the latest year for which such data are available. (See Table 7 on page 10.) According to law enforcement officials, methamphetamine abuse is increasing throughout the region as a result of the rising availability of Mexican ice methamphetamine in the area.



Table 7. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities, Northwest HIDTA Region, SFY2004–2006*

Drug	2004	2005	2006
Methamphetamine	5,913	7,364	7,687
Marijuana	6,461	6,700	7,425
Cocaine	2,998	3,356	4,028
Heroin	2,483	3,554	3,302

Source: Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse.

*State fiscal year is from June 30 to July 1.

The number of marijuana-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities has also increased and is only slightly less than the number of methamphetamine-related treatment admissions. In 2004, 6,461 marijuana-related treatment admissions were reported by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services; thereafter, such treatment admissions increased to 6,700 in 2005 and then to 7,425 in 2006. (See Table 7.) According to public health officials, increasing abuse of high-potency marijuana is a proximate cause for the increase in marijuana-related treatment admissions. Cocaine-related treatment admissions have similarly increased, from 2,998 in 2004 to 4,028 in 2006. According to law enforcement officials, cocaine abuse in the region is increasing as some methamphetamine abusers, faced with diminished supplies of the drug, are substituting cocaine.

Heroin abuse is prevalent in urban areas of the HIDTA region such as Seattle, Spokane, and Tacoma. However, the number of heroin-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities decreased in 2006 (3,302) after peaking in 2005 (3,554). ODDs, including MDMA, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), psilocybin mushrooms, ketamine, and GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), are commonly distributed and abused within the region. Diverted prescription drugs, particularly prescription narcotics, are also commonly abused

Table 8. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities Northwest HIDTA Counties, SFY2006*

HIDTA County	Methamphetamine	Marijuana	Cocaine	Heroin
Benton	367	241	72	19
Clark	967	442	111	204
Cowlitz	471	214	33	82
Franklin	113	112	53	6
King	1,165	1,572	1,561	1,491
Kitsap	475	358	62	48
Lewis	213	142	9	22
Pierce	217	1,089	703	388
Skagit	393	286	204	148
Snohomish	760	625	441	337
Spokane	1,026	775	363	175
Thurston	448	504	42	73
Whatcom	305	320	165	153
Yakima	767	745	209	156
Total	7,687	7,425	4,028	3,302

Source: Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

*State fiscal year is from June 30 to July 1.

throughout the region by a diverse user group. Abusers and distributors acquire prescription drugs through a variety of means including doctor shopping, drug theft, prescription fraud, and Internet purchase.

ILLICIT FINANCE

Traffickers launder illicit drug proceeds generated in the HIDTA region using various money laundering methods, based on the traffickers' level of sophistication. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups generally transport the proceeds they generate in the region in bulk to Mexico, where they are often deposited into a Mexican bank or a *casa de cambio* (exchange house) and then repatriated to the United States. Mexican traffickers also transport cash in bulk to southwestern states, where the funds are typically aggregated and eventually smuggled to Mexico. Asian DTOs and criminal

groups also use bulk cash smuggling to launder their illicit proceeds; they typically transport funds to Canada through POEs along the U.S.–Canada border in private vehicles.

Traffickers operating in the HIDTA region also structure drug funds⁴ through electronic wire transfer services and domestic banks, commingle drug proceeds with funds from cash-intensive businesses, use casinos to mask the nature of illicit proceeds, and use their funds to purchase real estate and luxury items, such as automobiles and jewelry. For example, Spokane law enforcement officials report that members of Mexican criminal groups frequently use front businesses such as restaurants, cleaning services, and landscaping firms to launder drug proceeds.

OUTLOOK

Mexican ice methamphetamine availability will increase in the Northwest HIDTA region as Mexican DTOs establish a stronger presence in the area and expand into the rural areas that lack the law enforcement resources to counter the threat. Mexican DTOs will continue to be able to meet methamphetamine market demands by supplying increasing amounts of Mexican ice methamphetamine, although this supply may be disrupted at times as a result of ongoing law enforcement operations and precursor chemical shortages. Local methamphetamine production will continue, although at a greatly reduced level. Strict legislation placed on retail pseudoephedrine

sales will continue to prompt local methamphetamine producers to search for alternate means of obtaining sufficient precursor chemicals.

Rising demand for high-potency marijuana within and outside the Northwest HIDTA region will fuel increasing levels of indoor cannabis cultivation throughout the area. Canada-based Vietnamese DTOs and criminal groups will significantly contribute to this increase by establishing new indoor grow operations in HIDTA counties in an attempt to profit from the rising demand while avoiding the risk of apprehension by law enforcement officials during cross-border smuggling operations at POEs along the U.S.–Canada border.

Cocaine distribution and use have increased in the region and will very likely rise further, although not to a level that would rival the methamphetamine threat in the near term. This increase is most likely the result of a combination of factors including lower-purity methamphetamine entering the market, periods of reduced availability, and an influx of new abusers who are initially drawn to powder cocaine under the misconception that it is a purer and safer drug compared with methamphetamine.

4. A person structures a transaction if that person, acting alone, or in conjunction with or on behalf of other persons, conducts or attempts to conduct one or more transactions in currency, in any amount, at one or more financial institutions, on one or more days, in any manner, for the purpose of evading the reporting requirements under Title 31. "In any manner" includes but is not limited to the breaking down of a single sum of currency exceeding \$10,000 into smaller sums, including sums at or below \$10,000. The transaction or transactions need not exceed the \$10,000 reporting threshold at any single financial institution on any single day in order to constitute structuring within the meaning of this definition.



SOURCES

Other

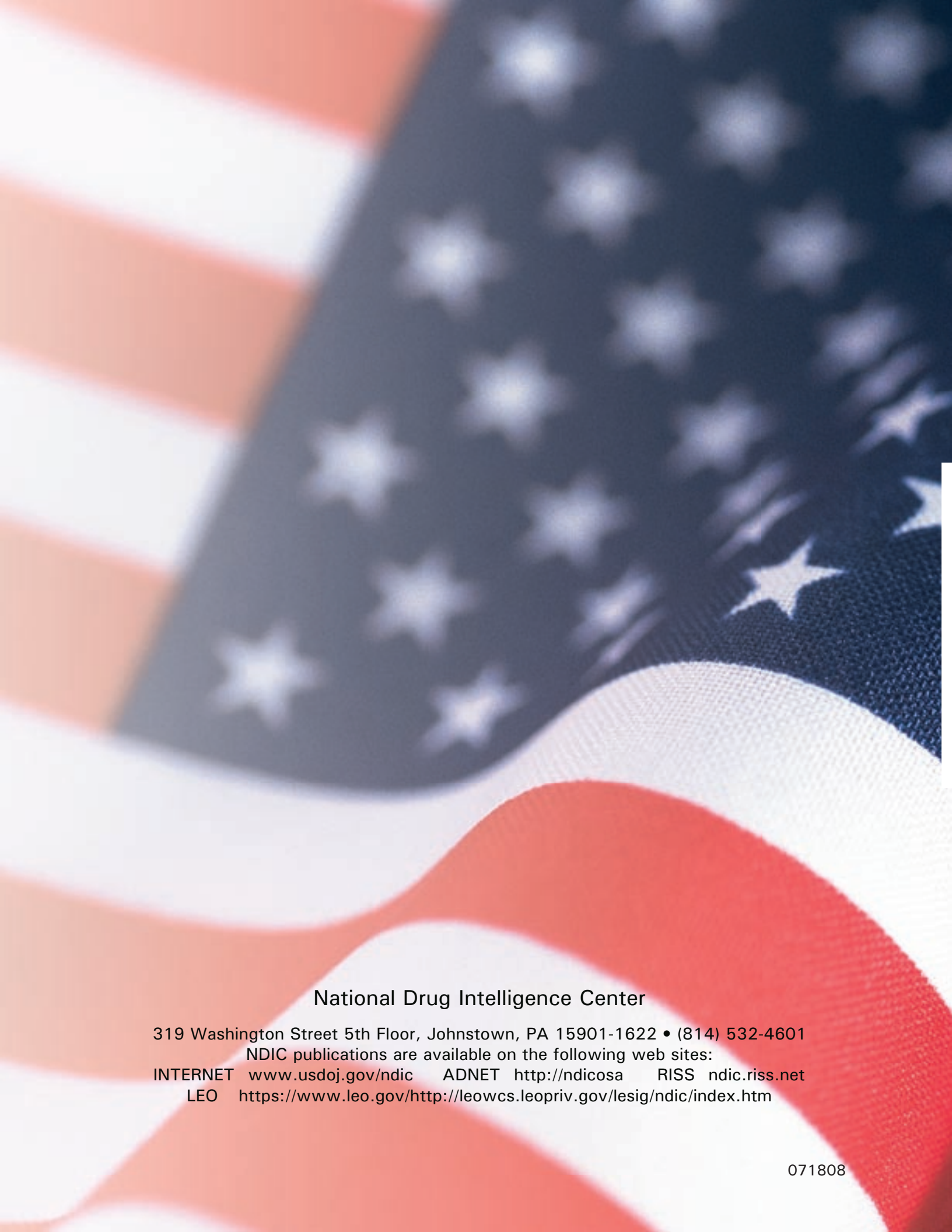
Pacific Integrated Border Intelligence Team

Local, State, and Regional

Des Moines Police Department
King County Medical Examiner's Office
King County Sheriff's Office
Seattle Police Department
Washington State Attorney General's Office
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
 Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse
Washington State Patrol
 Investigative Assistance Division
 K-9 Unit, Field Operations Bureau
 Pro-Active Methamphetamine Investigation Team
University of Washington
 Alcohol and Drug Abuse Institute

Federal

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 U.S. Coast Guard
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 Western States Information Network
Criminal Division
 Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force
Drug Enforcement Administration
 El Paso Intelligence Center
 National Seizure System
 Federal-Wide Drug Seizure System
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