

New Mexico

Drug Threat Assessment



National Drug Intelligence Center
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New Mexico Drug Threat Assessment

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Preface

This report is a strategic assessment that addresses the status and outlook of the drug threat to New Mexico. Analytical judgment determined the threat posed by each drug type or category, taking into account the most current quantitative and qualitative information on availability, demand, production or cultivation, transportation, and distribution, as well as the effects of a particular drug on abusers and society as a whole. While NDIC sought to incorporate the latest available information, a time lag often exists between collection and publication of data, particularly demand-related data sets. NDIC anticipates that this drug threat assessment will be useful to policymakers, law enforcement personnel, and treatment providers at the federal, state, and local levels because it draws upon a broad range of information sources to describe and analyze the drug threat to New Mexico.

New Mexico Drug Threat Assessment

Executive Summary

New Mexico is a major conduit for the flow of illicit drugs into the United States from Mexico. The quantity of illicit drugs transported through New Mexico far outweighs consumption within the state. Mexican drug trafficking organizations and Mexican criminal groups control the transportation and wholesale distribution of illicit drugs into and throughout New Mexico. Criminal groups, prison and street gangs, and local independent dealers distribute drugs at the retail level.

Expanded commercial trade between Mexico and the United States has led to a significant increase in commercial traffic between the two countries resulting in congestion at ports of entry along the Southwest Border. This congestion offers Mexican traffickers opportunities to smuggle illicit drugs via commercial and private vehicles through overburdened ports into the United States. Additionally, traffickers often employ couriers to smuggle drugs into the state.

Cocaine poses the most significant drug threat to New Mexico. Both powdered and crack cocaine continue to saturate the Albuquerque metropolitan area and other urban areas of the state. Prices and purity levels of powdered and crack cocaine have remained relatively stable throughout the state since 1999. Mexican drug trafficking organizations and Mexican criminal groups are the primary transporters of powdered cocaine from Mexico. Mexican drug trafficking organizations and Mexican criminal groups also control the wholesale distribution of powdered cocaine; prison and street gangs distribute powdered cocaine at the retail level. Crack cocaine distribution is limited to the retail level. Cuban criminal groups, street gangs, and local independent dealers purchase powdered cocaine from Mexican drug trafficking organizations and Mexican criminal groups within the state and convert it to crack for retail distribution.

Methamphetamine is an increasing drug threat to New Mexico. Throughout the state the availability and abuse of the drug are increasing. While most of the methamphetamine available in the state is smuggled across the border from Mexico, New Mexico law enforcement officials report an increase in the production and availability of locally produced methamphetamine. Mexican drug trafficking organizations and Mexican criminal groups are the primary transporters and wholesale distributors of Mexico-produced methamphetamine in New Mexico; Mexican criminal groups, outlaw motorcycle gangs, and

local independent dealers control the production and wholesale distribution of locally produced methamphetamine. Outlaw motorcycle gangs, prison and street gangs, and local independent dealers are the primary distributors of both Mexico- and locally produced methamphetamine at the retail level.

Heroin commonly is abused in New Mexico, as evidenced by the number of heroin-related deaths and treatment admissions. New Mexico leads the nation in per capita heroin-related deaths. Mexican black tar heroin is the most readily available type; however, Mexican brown powdered heroin also is available. Albuquerque is a transshipment point for Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin destined for the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and the Southwest.

Marijuana is the most readily available and most commonly abused drug in New Mexico. Most of the marijuana available in New Mexico is produced in Mexico; however, cannabis is cultivated in the state by local independent growers. While Mexican drug trafficking organizations and Mexican criminal groups dominate the transportation and wholesale distribution of Mexico-produced marijuana throughout the state, local independent dealers control the wholesale distribution of locally produced marijuana. Mexican criminal groups, street gangs, and local independent dealers are the primary retail distributors of Mexico- and locally produced marijuana throughout New Mexico.

The threat posed by **other dangerous drugs** to New Mexico is minimal. Increases in the availability and use of club drugs have been noted by New Mexico law enforcement officials; however, the user population remains very limited. MDMA-related distribution and abuse are being monitored closely in New Mexico, as they pose a growing threat elsewhere in the United States including states that border New Mexico. LSD and psilocybin are the primary hallucinogenic and psychedelic drugs abused in the state. In some areas of New Mexico, pharmaceutical drugs including oxycodone and hydrocodone products are diverted and abused. Although the diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs are limited, they are a concern in the state.

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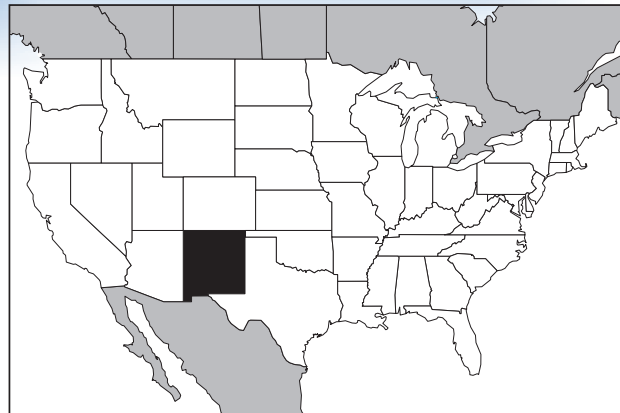
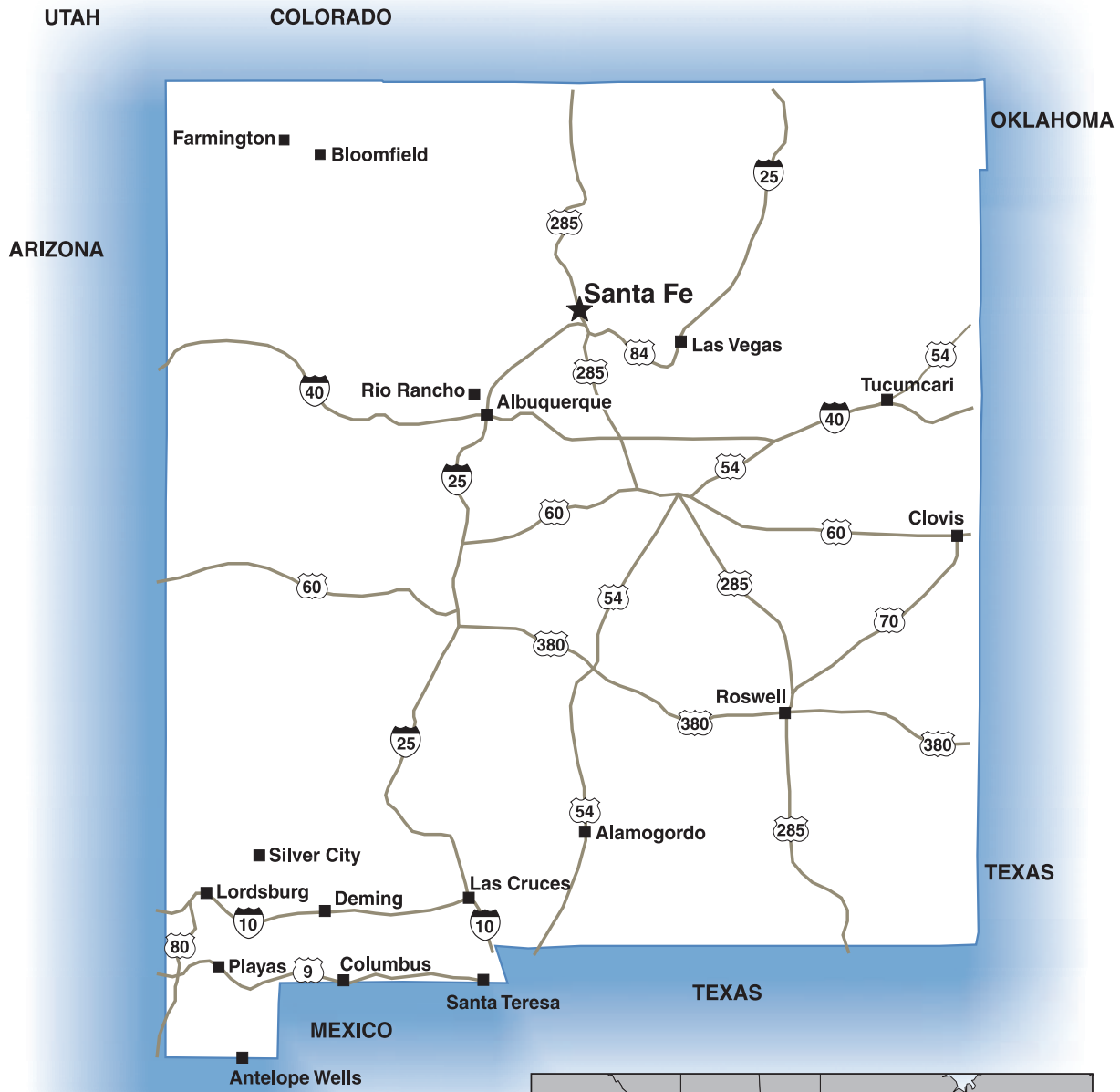
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New Mexico.

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Overview

New Mexico is the fifth largest state in land area, ranks thirty-sixth by population, and has over 1.8 million residents. Albuquerque, the state’s largest city, has more than 420,000 residents. Other principal cities include Las Cruces (75,786), Santa Fe (69,299), and Rio Rancho (52,012). New Mexico’s median household income, which ranks forty-fifth in the nation, is \$33,096—considerably lower than the national average of \$41,343. New Mexico has the fourth highest percentage of its population (18%) living below the U.S. poverty level.

New Mexico has three land ports of entry (POEs) on its 180-mile border with Mexico. From west to east, they are Antelope Wells, Columbus, and Santa Teresa. Columbus is New Mexico’s busiest POE and is the state’s only border crossing that is open and staffed 24 hours a day. Interstate highways and secondary roads connect the POEs along the Southwest Border to major New Mexico and U.S. cities. There are approximately 63,900 miles of highway in New Mexico, including three interstates. The state’s main vehicular arteries are Interstates 10, 25, and 40. Interstate 10 extends from Santa Monica, California, through the southwestern part of New Mexico, to I-95 in Jacksonville, Florida. Interstate 25 extends from I-10 in Las Cruces, inter-

Fast Facts	
New Mexico	
Population (2000)	1.8 million
U.S. population ranking	36th
Median household income (2000)	\$33,096
Unemployment rate (2001)	6.1%
Land area	121,356 square miles
Capital	Santa Fe
Other principal cities	Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Rio Rancho
Number of counties	33
Principal industries	Manufacturing of electric equipment, agriculture, petroleum and coal products, food processing

sects I-40 in Albuquerque, and connects to I-90 in Buffalo, Wyoming. Interstate 40 extends from Barstow, California, through central New Mexico to Wilmington, North Carolina. U.S. highways

also run through the state, connecting New Mexico to large cities in the western United States, such as Phoenix, Arizona (via US 60); Wichita, Kansas (via US 54); and Lubbock, Texas (via US 84). State highways, such as SR-9, offer travelers alternatives to the busy interstate highways. Often used as an alternative to I-10, SR-9 extends from Santa Teresa to SR-80 just inside New Mexico’s southwestern border with Arizona.

New Mexico has two international airports. The Albuquerque International Sunport is the state’s largest and busiest airport, averaging over 640 arrivals and departures daily. More than 6.2 million passengers traveled through Albuquerque International in 2000. During the same year, the airport’s freight center handled more than 190 million pounds of cargo. Las Cruces International Airport averages 189 commuter, charter, corporate, and private aircraft flights daily.

New Mexico also has transcontinental and regional cargo and passenger rail lines. Two major freight lines connect New Mexico and the western United States to the Midwest and points east. The state also has three short lines with regional routes that service New Mexico and Texas.

The state’s proximity to Mexico, as well as its topography, makes it vulnerable to drug smuggling. Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and Mexican criminal groups take advantage of the state’s topography—particularly in the “boot heel” area—to smuggle drugs to the state by land and air.

New Mexico Boot Heel

The New Mexico boot heel—named because of its shape—is located in the southwestern county of Hidalgo. This barren area is sparsely populated and consists of mountain ranges and plateaus scattered throughout the highlands. Due to its geography and topography, the boot heel area is a vulnerable location for illicit drug smuggling.

One of the major challenges to interdiction efforts at the New Mexico–Mexico border are the “gates” in the border fence. According to the U.S. Customs Service (USCS) in Las Cruces, drug traffickers cut out sections of the fence creating gates to facilitate the movement of vehicles or individuals smuggling illegal drugs into the United States. The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) uses remote sensors to monitor activity along the border fence in an effort to thwart smuggling at these gates.

The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has dramatically increased the volume of cross-border traffic at POEs along the Southwest Border. Since NAFTA went into effect in 1994, cross-border commercial truck traffic has increased 170 percent. The increase in commercial traffic has resulted in congestion at Southwest Border POEs, and New Mexico’s POEs are no exception. Increases in commercial traffic have been noted annually at New Mexico POEs since the implementation of NAFTA. (See Table 1 on page 3.) From 1999 through 2000 the USCS reported a 30 percent increase in the number of commercial vehicles at the Santa Teresa POE, located south of Las Cruces, and a 1 percent increase at the Columbus POE. Additionally, border crossings in private vehicles increased at the Santa Teresa POE (9%) and the Columbus POE (12%). Antelope Wells, New Mexico’s third land POE, is not considered a full-service POE and is staffed by only one USCS inspector from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily. Approximately 10 to 30 vehicles cross at the POE per month. Seizures are rare and statistics are not available.

Private and commercial vehicles are commonly used to smuggle drugs into New Mexico. Smugglers often use a technique called shotgunning to transport drugs into the state. Shotgunning involves the division of large quantities of drugs into several smaller shipments that are sent through the same POE at approximately the same

Table 1. Port of Entry Totals and Percent of Change, Selected New Mexico Ports, 1999–2000

Port	Year	Pedestrians	Commercial Trucks	Private Vehicles
Columbus	1999	174,688	4,867	348,693
Columbus	2000	193,067	4,892	388,805
Percent Change		11	1	12
Santa Teresa	1999	4,274	23,899	71,879
Santa Teresa	2000	3,865	31,018	78,063
Percent Change		-10	30	9

Source: U.S. Customs Service, 2000.

time. Using this method, if law enforcement officers stop one or two of the vehicles, most of the drug shipments will still reach their intended destination. Some smugglers use a similar technique that involves the use of sacrificial vehicles that they expect law enforcement personnel to stop and seize. While attention is focused on the seized vehicle, other vehicles may pass through the POE without an intensive inspection.

Cargo and passenger rail lines also are used to transport contraband including cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana into and through New Mexico. Authorities in New Mexico have discovered false compartments in grain cars, concrete hoppers, and boxcars. Although the extent of drug transportation by rail is unknown, law enforcement personnel in New Mexico have made drug seizures from both freight and passenger trains.

Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups transport cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and marijuana from Mexico into and through New Mexico using mail and parcel delivery services. In addition, Mexican DTOs often employ couriers and drug transporters to smuggle these drugs into the state.

Drug distribution in New Mexico is conducted by a number of criminal entities. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups are the primary wholesale distributors of illicit drugs in

New Mexico. Some of these Mexican criminal groups often function as midlevel distributors who distribute wholesale quantities of drugs to outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs), prison and street gangs, and local independent dealers. Some criminal groups serve as retail drug distributors. OMGs, prison and street gangs, and local independent dealers also are involved in the distribution of drugs at the retail level.

Bandidos Motorcycle Club is the most significant OMG involved in drug trafficking in New Mexico. Bandidos maintains chapters in Albuquerque (2), Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Silver City, and Roswell. Additionally, Bandidos has a chapter in El Paso, Texas, which has extended its influence throughout the El Paso-Las Cruces area. Although drug trafficking is Bandidos' major source of income, it also is involved in contract murder, extortion, welfare and bank fraud, and arson. Law enforcement officials report that Bandidos is expanding in New Mexico in an attempt to control both the wholesale and retail distribution of methamphetamine.

In Albuquerque and other urban areas of the state, violence is often associated with drug-related gang activity. There are approximately 680 gangs totaling 13,800 members in New Mexico. Many of these gangs are involved in drug-related activities. Among these are prison gangs, including New Mexico Syndicate and

Table 2. Federal Drug-Related Sentences, New Mexico, FY1995–FY2000

Drug	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Crack Cocaine	16	29	29	34	40	29
Powdered Cocaine	47	55	83	62	53	96
Methamphetamine	11	12	50	50	81	129
Heroin	7	22	17	9	12	38
Marijuana	317	176	239	231	234	296
Other Drugs	6	3	5	4	10	6
Total Drug Sentences	404	297	423	390	430	594
Percent of Total Federal Sentences	61.8	48.1	51.3	46.4	38.3	36.6

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, *U.S. Sentencing Guidelines Report*.

Barrio Azteca, and street gangs, such as the 18th Street, Los Padillas, and San Jose gangs. The retail distribution of illicit drugs is the primary source of income for gangs in New Mexico. As a result, gangs often resort to violence to protect their turf and distribution base. The competition for drug distribution has intensified gang rivalries, leading to violent confrontations and adversely affecting public safety in the urban areas of the state.

Drug-related violence often occurs along the New Mexico–Mexico border. USBP agents have been fired upon and ambushed by drug smugglers. USBP officials state that one Mexican DTO has placed a \$200,000 bounty on U.S. law enforcement personnel. In the 77-year history of the

USBP, 86 agents have been killed in the line of duty; 17 have been killed since 1995.

Federal drug sentences in New Mexico have increased overall since the mid-1990s. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, the total number of drug offenses increased overall from 404 in fiscal year (FY) 1995 to 594 in FY2000. During this same period, the number of methamphetamine sentences increased each year, from 11 federal sentences in FY1995 to 129 in FY2000. Marijuana sentences were the most common drug sentences in New Mexico each year during this period. During FY2000, 49.8 percent of federal drug sentences in New Mexico were marijuana-related, compared with 31.2 percent nationwide.

Table 3. Percent of Adult Male Arrestees Testing Positive for Drugs, Albuquerque, 2000

Drug	African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	Total
Cocaine	37.4	24.2	43.5	34.8
Methamphetamine	3.9	16.9	2.0	4.7
Heroin	6.8	5.8	16.6	11.7
Marijuana	63.8	40.3	49.4	47.3
Any Drug	78.6	59.3	69.5	64.9

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, *2000 Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program Annual Report, Annual Report on Drug Use Among Adult and Juvenile Arrestees*.

Drug-related deaths are increasing in New Mexico as a result of chronic drug abuse. Health care professionals and treatment providers in New Mexico note that many residents in the state heavily abuse drugs as a means to psychologically escape from impoverished living conditions. New Mexico has one of the highest drug-related death rates in the country. In 1997 there were 224 drug-related deaths reported in the state. The number of drug-related deaths increased to 237 in 1998 and to 259 in 1999.

Drug abuse is prevalent among adult male arrestees in Albuquerque. According to 2000 Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) data, 64.9 percent of adult male arrestees in Albuquerque tested positive for any drug. (See Table 3 on page 4.) Among male arrestees, 78.6 percent of African American, 69.5 percent of Hispanic, and 59.3 percent of Caucasian arrestees tested positive for any drug.

Cocaine

Cocaine poses the most significant drug threat to New Mexico. Both powdered and crack cocaine continue to saturate the Albuquerque metropolitan area and other urban areas of the state. Prices and purity levels of powdered and crack cocaine have remained relatively stable throughout the state since 1999. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups are the primary transporters of powdered cocaine from Mexico.

Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups control the wholesale distribution of powdered cocaine; prison and street gangs distribute powdered cocaine at the retail level. Crack cocaine distribution is limited to the retail level. Cuban criminal groups, street gangs, and local independent dealers purchase powdered cocaine from Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups within the state and convert it to crack.

Abuse

Although there is evidence that powdered and crack cocaine abuse has decreased, it nevertheless remains a major health problem in New Mexico. According to the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), cocaine treatment admissions decreased overall from 401 in 1993 to 375 in 1998. However, a disparity in data reporting for 1998 admissions to substance abuse treatment programs occurred and resulted in underreporting. Cocaine abuse continues to challenge health care and treatment providers. In a few areas of the state, some inpatient treatment providers are overwhelmed with requests for beds. The demand for treatment is so great that one treatment facility is running only outpatient services and referring cocaine and heroin addicts to other local or out-of-state providers that have beds available.

Cocaine abuse among adolescents continues to be a concern throughout the state. According to the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS),

17.2 percent of New Mexico high school student respondents reported lifetime cocaine use. The Substance Use Among Albuquerque's Adult Population survey indicates that 17 years was the mean age of first cocaine use reported by Albuquerque resident respondents.

Cocaine abuse is also prevalent among adult male arrestees in Albuquerque. According to 2000 ADAM data, 34.8 percent of adult male arrestees in Albuquerque tested positive for cocaine. (See Table 3 on page 4.) Among male arrestees, 43.5 percent of Hispanic, 37.4 percent of African American, and 24.2 percent of Caucasian arrestees tested positive for the drug.

Availability

Cocaine poses the most significant drug threat to New Mexico. Powdered cocaine is widely available throughout the state, and crack is available predominantly in Albuquerque and Las Cruces. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), both powdered and crack cocaine continue to saturate the Albuquerque

metropolitan area and the other urban areas of New Mexico.

The price and purity of powdered cocaine have remained stable throughout New Mexico since 1999, indicating that the supply of the drug has remained essentially unchanged. The DEA Albuquerque District Office reports that

Table 4. Cocaine Prices and Purity, Albuquerque and Las Cruces, 2001

	Price/Ounce	Purity (Percent)
Powdered Cocaine		
Albuquerque	\$800 – \$1,400	80 – 95
Las Cruces	\$500 – \$900	29 – 77
Crack Cocaine		
Albuquerque	\$600 – \$1,000	NA
Las Cruces	\$900	56 – 61

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, El Paso Division, *Quarterly Trends in the Traffic Report, 2nd Quarter FY2001*.

powdered cocaine prices range from \$800 to \$1,400 per ounce. Purity levels for powdered cocaine in Albuquerque range from 80 to 95 percent. In Las Cruces powdered cocaine prices range from \$14,000 to \$18,000 per kilogram and \$500 to \$900 per ounce. Purity levels for the drug in Las Cruces range from 29 to 77 percent.

As with powdered cocaine, the relatively stable price and purity of crack cocaine in New Mexico indicate that the availability of the drug has remained unchanged. Local law enforcement officials in Albuquerque report that the supply of crack cocaine in the city is virtually unlimited. The DEA Albuquerque District Office reports that crack cocaine is widely available in its jurisdiction. Crack cocaine prices range from \$600 to \$1,000 per ounce and \$20 per rock. Crack cocaine is also available “doubled up”—\$100 for 10 rocks that normally would have sold for \$200. Crack purity levels in Albuquerque were

unavailable. In Las Cruces the price of crack cocaine is approximately \$900 per ounce and \$20 per rock. Crack purity levels in Las Cruces range between 56 and 61 percent.

Cocaine seizure amounts at New Mexico POEs have decreased overall. USCS reports that the quantity of cocaine seized nationwide declined approximately 7 percent, falling from 160,718 pounds in FY1999 to 150,036 pounds in FY2000. The amount of cocaine seized by the USCS in New Mexico also declined during that period. In fact, the amount of cocaine seized in New Mexico has decreased substantially since FY1998. Some law enforcement officials attribute this 3-year decline to smugglers shotgunning shipments in an effort to avoid significant losses to law enforcement.

**Table 5. U.S. Customs Service Drug Seizures by Port (in Pounds*)
New Mexico, FY1998–FY2000**

Drug	Port	FY1998	FY1999	FY2000
Cocaine	Columbus	131	2	5
	Santa Teresa	55	318**	9
Total		186	320	14
Heroin	Columbus	2	0	16
	Santa Teresa	5	1	1
Total		7	1	17
Methamphetamine	Columbus	0	1	0
	Santa Teresa	21	0	0
Total		21	1	0
Marijuana	Columbus	27,397	30,829	45,572
	Santa Teresa	6,558	6,193	17,223
Total		33,955	37,022	62,795

*Rounded to the nearest pound.

**Eighty-nine percent of total amount due to four seizures in the third quarter of FY1999.

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

Violence

Much of the violence associated with cocaine in New Mexico is a result of competition for control of distribution areas. In the early 1980s Mexican DTOs began receiving cocaine from Colombian DTOs as payment for smuggling the drug. As the Mexican DTOs became the principal transporters for the Colombian DTOs, the Mexican DTOs received larger quantities of cocaine as payment in kind. At the time significant cocaine markets did not exist in Mexico, thus requiring that the Mexican DTOs move the cocaine not only on behalf of the Colombians but for themselves as well. As these Mexican DTOs and associated criminal groups moved to solidify wholesale cocaine markets in the southwestern and western United States, they came into conflict with U.S.-based Mexican and Hispanic criminal

groups. Subsequent competition among these various factions, including independent dealers, has led to violent confrontations. In recent years, it appears that the major Colombian DTOs have ceded control or dominance in these markets to Mexican DTOs and associated criminal groups.

Prison and street gangs involved in the retail distribution of powdered cocaine often engage in violence to protect their turf. Street gangs, such as the 18th Street and Los Padillas gangs, who convert powdered cocaine to crack and distribute crack at the retail level also perpetrate violence as a means to defend their territory. Additionally, law enforcement officials report that Cuban criminal groups have used violence as a means to gain control of retail crack distribution in Albuquerque.

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Violence associated with cocaine distribution and abuse is a serious concern in New Mexico. ADAM 2000 data for Albuquerque revealed that, of those arrested for violent crimes and tested for drug use, 35.3 percent of males tested positive for cocaine. Among females arrested for violent

crimes and tested for drug use, 33.3 percent tested positive for the drug. Law enforcement officials in Albuquerque reported that most criminal activity in the city—armed robberies, vehicle thefts, burglaries, and homicides—was linked directly to distribution and abuse of drugs such as cocaine.

Production

Coca is not cultivated nor is cocaine produced in New Mexico. However, street gangs based in

Albuquerque and Las Cruces convert powdered cocaine into crack.

Transportation

Cocaine is transported to New Mexico primarily from Mexico by Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups. The Mexican DTO presenting the greatest transportation threat to New Mexico is based in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. This DTO is responsible for the movement of large shipments of cocaine to and across the U.S.–Mexico border. Historically, the El Paso–Juarez corridor, which includes Las Cruces, has been a primary route for this organization’s smuggling operations. This DTO has expanded its operation toward the Gulf of Mexico in an effort to assert primacy along a greater portion of the U.S.–Mexico border. This expansion facilitates the movement of cocaine from Colombia and other South American source areas to locations throughout the United States, including New Mexico.

Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups use various modes to transport cocaine into the state, including privately owned and commercial vehicles. Multikilogram quantities of powdered cocaine often are transported across the Southwest Border concealed in false compartments in vehicles or intermingled with legitimate cargo. In an attempt to prevent thorough vehicular inspections, smugglers have been known to flood border POEs by shotgunning cocaine shipments.

The Santa Teresa POE is a prime location for Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups attempting to smuggle cocaine into the United States. It is suspected that this POE is a gateway for nighttime smuggling, since it is manned only during daylight hours. Traffickers smuggling drugs into New Mexico at the Santa Teresa POE frequently use SR-9 because it is close to the POE. Additionally, SR-9 is favored as an alternative to I-10—one of the major drug trafficking routes in New Mexico and the United States. State and local law enforcement personnel in cities along I-10—Las Cruces, Deming, and Lordsburg—conduct extensive and systematic interdiction efforts along the New Mexico portion of the interstate.

DTOs frequently use women and children as couriers to smuggle cocaine into the United States through POEs. Women and children, as well as teenagers, are used primarily because traffickers deem them less likely to be targeted by law enforcement authorities. In nearby El Paso, Texas, a prosecutor related a case involving two girls, ages 12 and 13, each carrying more than 4 pounds of cocaine in her school backpack.

Some Mexican DTOs transport cocaine by aircraft to remote locations in Mexico within 25 miles of the New Mexico–Mexico border. The aircraft typically remains on the ground for about

30 minutes while the illicit cargo is unloaded. After the cocaine is unloaded, the aircraft returns to central Mexico and the drug is prepared for smuggling into New Mexico. The Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center reports that, between January 1994 and March 1999, radar confirmed 4,396 short landings or fades just south of the New Mexico border. There continues to be a high number of low-flying aircraft reported in the boot heel area of New Mexico.

Mexican criminal groups also transport cocaine through New Mexico from other states along the Southwest Border en route to cities such as Chicago, Illinois; Denver, Colorado; Kansas

Distribution

Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups control the wholesale distribution of powdered cocaine in New Mexico. Intelligence sources report that Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups increasingly are purchasing powdered cocaine directly from organizations in Colombia. Some Mexican criminal groups often serve as wholesale distributors who work on behalf of Mexican DTOs and sell the drug to retail distributors in New Mexico. Authorities at the New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) report that many Mexican criminal groups have family members based in New Mexico. These family members facilitate the distribution of cocaine smuggled into the state.

Supplied by Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups, prison and street gangs distribute powdered cocaine at the retail level. Law enforcement officials report that the New Mexico Syndicate prison gang distributes powdered cocaine at the retail level in New Mexico. Some New Mexico Syndicate members are also members of street gangs that are believed to have direct connections to Mexican criminal groups operating in Mexico and throughout the southwestern United States. New Mexico Syndicate recruits street gang members, including members of the 18th Street and Los Padillas gangs, to facilitate the retail distri-

City, Missouri; and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Interstates 10, 25, 40, and US 54 are the primary vehicular routes used to transport cocaine. According to Operation Pipeline statistics, 62 kilograms of cocaine were seized during 15 traffic stops on New Mexico highways in 2000.

Operation Pipeline

Operation Pipeline, a national interdiction program supported by the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), operates along the highways and interstates most commonly used to transport illegal drugs and drug proceeds.

bution of powdered cocaine; this practice provides New Mexico Syndicate with a means to extend its influence beyond prison walls.

Crack cocaine distribution is limited to the retail level. Cuban criminal groups, street gangs, and local independent dealers purchase powdered cocaine from Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups within the state and convert the drug to crack for personal use and further distribution. Cuban criminal groups, composed primarily of Cuban nationals, control the distribution of crack at the retail level in Albuquerque. The New Mexico HIDTA reports that Cuban criminal groups are expanding their distribution of crack from Albuquerque to less populated areas, such as Chavez and San Miguel Counties. Albuquerque law enforcement officials report that street gangs and local independent dealers also distribute crack at the retail level. In Las Cruces street gangs convert powdered cocaine to crack and distribute the drug in the southeastern area of the state, including Lea, Eddy, and Dona Ana Counties.

Law enforcement officers in New Mexico report that retail powdered and crack cocaine dealers use discreet sales methods. Some powdered cocaine dealers have implemented a call-and-deliver system using cell phones, pay phones,

and pagers. Buyers order powdered cocaine by telephone, and dealers deliver it to an agreed upon location, reducing the likelihood of a large

loss should law enforcement officers arrest a distributor. Retail-level crack dealers increasingly are using drug houses to conduct sales.

Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine is an increasing drug threat to New Mexico. Throughout the state the availability and abuse of the drug are increasing. While most of the methamphetamine available in the state is smuggled across the border from Mexico, New Mexico law enforcement officials report an increase in the production and availability of locally produced methamphetamine. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups are the

primary transporters and wholesale distributors of Mexico-produced methamphetamine in New Mexico; Mexican criminal groups, OMGs, and local independent dealers control the production and wholesale distribution of locally produced methamphetamine. OMGs, prison and street gangs, and local independent dealers are the primary distributors of both Mexico- and locally produced methamphetamine at the retail level.

Abuse

Methamphetamine abuse is increasing in New Mexico as evidenced by the increase in the number of individuals seeking treatment. Treatment providers throughout the state report a significant increase in the abuse of the drug. According to TEDS, methamphetamine treatment admissions more than doubled from 92 admissions in 1993 to 210 in 1998. However, a disparity in data reporting for 1998 admissions to substance abuse treatment programs occurred and resulted in underreporting.

The low cost and long-lasting euphoric effects of methamphetamine have attracted new users to the drug. There also is a perception that methamphetamine is not as dangerous as cocaine or heroin and will not result in long-term addiction. As a result, abusers of other drugs—particularly crack cocaine—have started to use methamphetamine. The number of youth who have reported using methamphetamine is an additional concern. According to 1999 YRBS data, 15.3 percent of

New Mexico high school student respondents reported lifetime methamphetamine use.

Methamphetamine abuse is reported among adult male arrestees in Albuquerque. According to 2000 ADAM data, 4.7 percent of adult male arrestees in Albuquerque tested positive for methamphetamine. Among male arrestees, 16.9 percent of Caucasian, 3.9 percent of African American, and 2.0 percent of Hispanic arrestees tested positive for the drug. (See Table 3 on page 4.)

There are serious physical and psychological effects related to methamphetamine abuse. Common effects of methamphetamine abuse include hyperthermia, convulsions, and cardiovascular collapse. Psychological paranoia associated with methamphetamine may lead to homicidal and suicidal tendencies. Long-term effects of methamphetamine abuse include kidney complications, lung disorders, brain damage, liver damage, and blood clots.

Availability

Methamphetamine is readily available throughout New Mexico. While most of the methamphetamine available in the state is

smuggled across the border from Mexico, locally produced methamphetamine also is available. The DEA Albuquerque District

Office reports that methamphetamine in Albuquerque sells for \$60 per gram and \$900 to \$1,200 per ounce. The average purity of methamphetamine in Albuquerque is 80 percent. In Las Cruces methamphetamine is available for \$40 to \$80 per gram and \$800 to \$1,000 per ounce. Purity levels in the Las Cruces area range from 26 to 99 percent.

Methamphetamine availability is increasing rapidly in the “Four Corners” area of New Mexico. San Juan County is the distribution hub for the Four Corners area. The New Mexico HIDTA reports that the most significant methamphetamine investigations have been centered in Farmington, San Juan County. Law enforcement authorities in Bloomfield, located just east of Farmington, report that methamphetamine-related activity poses the most serious crime problem in their jurisdiction.

Violence

Methamphetamine-related violence is a significant threat to New Mexico. Methamphetamine is a powerful stimulant that affects the central nervous system and can induce anxiety, delusions, hallucinations, insomnia, mood swings, paranoia, and violent behavior. Abusers of methamphetamine frequently commit crimes and violent acts to obtain money to support their drug habits or as a result of the “tweaking” stage of abuse. Law enforcement officials in New Mexico report that distributors often use violence in the course of conducting business and while defending their territory.

Tweaking

During the tweaking stage, the methamphetamine abuser often has not slept for days and, consequently, is extremely irritable. The “tweaker” also craves more methamphetamine, which results in frustration and contributes to anxiety and restlessness. In this stage, the abuser may become violent without provocation. Case histories indicate that tweakers have become antagonized at the mere sight of a police uniform.

Four Corners

The Four Corners area refers to the point at which New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado meet. It is the only point in the United States common to four state corners.

Methamphetamine is not seized frequently at New Mexico POEs. Methamphetamine seizures occur more frequently on the state’s interstate highways. USCS reports that less than 1 pound quantities were seized at New Mexico POEs in FY1999 and FY2000. (See Table 5 on page 7.) Methamphetamine seizures are more common on the state’s northbound or eastbound interstate highways. According to Operation Pipeline data, the amount of methamphetamine seized on New Mexico interstates increased from approximately 3 kilograms in 1999 to over 40 kilograms during 2000.

Territory disputes among OMGs and other methamphetamine retail distributors often result in violence. Law enforcement officials report that the Bandidos Motorcycle Club, a violent OMG, is attempting to gain control over the distribution of locally produced methamphetamine in New Mexico. Additionally, prison gangs such as New Mexico Syndicate and street gangs such as 18th Street are involved in the distribution of methamphetamine.

The violence associated with the competition for turf constitutes a serious threat to public safety in New Mexico.

Production

Although most of the methamphetamine that is available in the state is produced in Mexico, local methamphetamine production has increased. Mexican criminal groups, OMGs, and local independent dealers are responsible for most—if not all—of the methamphetamine production in the state. Law enforcement officers in New Mexico seized 70 methamphetamine laboratories during 2000. These laboratories typically were small-scale, capable of producing only ounce quantities. However, the largest laboratory dismantled in the state was capable of producing up to 3 pounds per cook.

Methamphetamine is produced throughout the state using various ephedrine/pseudoephedrine reduction methods including the hydriodic acid/red phosphorus, iodine/red phosphorus, and Birch reduction (Nazi) methods. However, the iodine/red phosphorus and Birch reduction methods of production are quickly replacing the

hydriodic/red phosphorus method. The DEA El Paso Division reports that the Birch reduction method of production is used increasingly in southeastern New Mexico.

Methamphetamine production creates toxic and hazardous waste that endangers civilians, law enforcement personnel, emergency response teams, and the environment. Methamphetamine laboratories contain a variety of highly flammable toxic chemicals and vapors. For every pound of methamphetamine produced, 5 to 7 pounds of toxic waste result. This waste usually is dumped in rural areas, contaminating soil and groundwater. The U.S. Forest Service reports that some methamphetamine producers set up laboratories on federal land and dump the toxic by-products directly on the ground, causing serious environmental damage. The resulting cleanup is costly, and the damage to the environment is irreparable. The U.S. Forest Service also reports that

Methamphetamine Production Methods

Ephedrine/Pseudoephedrine Reduction:

- **Hydriodic acid/red phosphorus.** The principal chemicals are ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, hydriodic acid, and red phosphorus. This method can yield multipound quantities of high quality d-methamphetamine and often is associated with Mexican drug trafficking organizations.
- **Iodine/red phosphorus.** The principal chemicals are ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, iodine, and red phosphorus. The required hydriodic acid in this variation of the method above is produced by the reaction of iodine in water with red phosphorus. This method yields high quality d-methamphetamine. Another iodine/red phosphorus method, limited to small production batches, is called the cold cook method because the chemicals, instead of being heated, are placed in a hot environment such as in direct sunlight.
- **Birch reduction.** The principal chemicals are ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, anhydrous ammonia, and sodium or lithium metal. Also known as the “Nazi” method, this method typically yields ounce quantities of high quality d-methamphetamine and often is used by independent dealers and producers.

Phenyl-2-propanone:

- **P2P.** The principal chemicals are phenyl-2-propanone, aluminum, methylamine, and mercuric acid. This method yields lower quality dl-methamphetamine and has been associated with outlaw motorcycle gangs.

operators set up “dirt labs” where the producers “scrub” the contaminated soil to recover methamphetamine and precursor residue.

New Mexico is a transit state for methamphetamine precursor and essential chemicals. Albuquerque law enforcement officials report

that the city has become a transit area for precursor chemicals destined for out-of-state methamphetamine production. In 1999 USCS inspectors at the Columbus POE seized drums of Freon that were destined for Mesa, Arizona, to be used in methamphetamine production.

Transportation

Most of the methamphetamine available in New Mexico is smuggled from Mexico. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups are the primary transporters of Mexico-produced methamphetamine into and through the state. Some OMGs, street gangs, and local independent dealers also are involved in transportation of Mexico-produced methamphetamine; others, particularly local independent dealers, transport locally produced methamphetamine.

Mexican DTOs often employ couriers and drug transporters to smuggle Mexico-produced methamphetamine into New Mexico from Mexico. The use of foreign nationals as couriers has been noted in a number of seizures. In March 2000 DEA special agents in Bernalillo County seized 3 kilograms of suspected Mexico-produced methamphetamine discovered in a rented car. Seven methamphetamine bundles, wrapped in cellophane and duct tape and placed inside clear plastic bags, were concealed inside the engine area of the vehicle. The driver, a male Mexican national from Mexico City, was arrested.

Mexico- and locally produced methamphetamine continue to be seized on interstate highways in New Mexico. The principal methamphetamine transportation routes include I-10, I-25, and I-40. Methamphetamine seizures on I-40 have increased from pound to multipound quantities. According to Operation Pipeline data, during 2000 over 40 kilograms of methamphetamine were seized during 14 traffic stops on New Mexico interstates. The methamphetamine seized during these stops was transported from Arizona, California, and

New Mexico and was destined for Colorado, Iowa, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas.

Various routes in eastern New Mexico are used to transport methamphetamine to other states. The Multi-County Regional Threat Assessment for Curry, Quay, De Baca, Guadalupe, and Roosevelt Counties indicates that transportation of methamphetamine is a serious problem in these counties. Located in eastern New Mexico, these counties include a number of highways that extend into Texas and are used to transport methamphetamine into and throughout New Mexico and on to other states. The New Mexico Region V Multi-Jurisdictional Drug Task Force in Clovis, Curry County, reports that methamphetamine is transported through its area from suppliers in Mexico and California to destinations in Illinois and Indiana.

Methamphetamine Seized Near Orogrande

In May 2000 following an alert by a drug detection canine, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents and Border Patrol agents at the US 54 checkpoint near Orogrande, New Mexico, seized 25 kilograms of Mexico-produced methamphetamine. The 23 packages of methamphetamine, wrapped in cellophane and carbon paper, were concealed in two metal boxes inside the gas tank of a vehicle. The driver, a 31-year-old male Mexican national and resident of Denver, Colorado, and the passenger, a 27-year-old female U.S. citizen living in Littleton, Colorado, were arrested. They were en route to Denver, Colorado, from El Paso, Texas.

Source: EPIC.

Distribution

Working through established drug networks, Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups control the supply of Mexico-produced methamphetamine in New Mexico. Many of these DTOs and criminal groups have established production sites in Mexico near the New Mexico–Mexico border in an effort to expedite the transportation and distribution of the drug. Some Mexican criminal groups often serve as midlevel wholesale distributors on behalf of Mexican DTOs.

Wholesale distribution of locally produced methamphetamine is conducted primarily by Mexican criminal groups, OMGs, and local independent dealers. These entities, which also control the local production of the drug, typically distribute the drug to close associates and retail distributors in areas throughout New Mexico. Law enforcement sources indicate that Bandidos has chapters in New Mexico and is attempting to gain control of the wholesale distribution of locally produced methamphetamine throughout the state.

OMGs, prison and street gangs, as well as local independent dealers distribute Mexico- and locally produced methamphetamine at the retail level. These gangs and independent dealers will sell either type of methamphetamine, depending on the drug's availability. Bandidos is very active in the retail distribution of methamphetamine—primarily, but not exclusively, locally produced methamphetamine—throughout the state. Law enforcement officials in Albuquerque report that the New Mexico Syndicate prison gang is also involved in retail methamphetamine distribution. As it does with other drugs, New Mexico Syndicate often works with street gangs, particularly the 18th Street gang, to distribute methamphetamine at the retail level. Local independent dealers—typically Caucasian males who sell ounce quantities—also are involved in retail methamphetamine distribution throughout the state.

Heroin

Heroin commonly is abused in New Mexico, as evidenced by the number of heroin-related deaths and treatment admissions. New Mexico leads the nation in per capita heroin-related deaths. Mexican black tar heroin is the most readily available type;

however, Mexican brown powdered heroin also is available. Albuquerque is a transshipment point for Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin destined for the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and the Southwest.

Abuse

Heroin has been a factor in a number of deaths in New Mexico. According to the State of New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator, the number of drug-related deaths has increased every year from 1997 through 1999. In 1997 there were 224 drug-related deaths; that number increased to 237 in 1998. In 1999 there were 259 drug-related deaths in New Mexico, of which 67 percent (174) were heroin-related. According to the New Mexico Department of Health, New

Mexico leads the nation in heroin-related deaths per capita. Rio Arriba County, located in northern New Mexico, has the highest heroin-related death rate in the state and one of the highest in the country. In 2000 Rio Arriba County had 19 reported heroin-related overdose deaths.

Heroin treatment admissions, though declining, indicate that heroin continues to be commonly abused in New Mexico. According to TEDS, heroin treatment admissions increased from 339 in

Police Provide Drug for Effects of Heroin Overdose

Because of the high heroin-related death rate in Rio Arriba County, the Espanola Police Department, located in the southern part of the county, has supplied its officers with the drug Narcan. This drug almost instantaneously reverses the overdose effects of opioids such as heroin, methadone, morphine, and opium.

Source: *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, 5 August 2001.

1993, to a peak of 514 in 1996, then decreased to 278 in 1998. However, a disparity in data reporting for 1998 admissions to substance abuse treatment programs occurred and resulted in underreporting. In some areas of the state, significant demand for heroin-related inpatient treatment exists. In Espanola the demand for heroin abuse treatment is so great that one treat-

ment facility is offering only outpatient services and referring addicts to other local or out-of-state providers where beds are available.

Heroin abuse, particularly among adolescents, continues to be a concern throughout the state. According to the 1999 YRBS, 5.1 percent of high school student respondents reported lifetime use of heroin. The mean age of first heroin use reported by Albuquerque resident respondents was 17 years, according to the Substance Use Among Albuquerque's Adult Population survey.

Heroin abuse is noted among adult male arrestees in Albuquerque. According to 2000 ADAM data, 11.7 percent of adult male arrestees in Albuquerque tested positive for heroin. Among male arrestees, 16.6 percent of Hispanic, 6.8 percent of African American, and 5.8 percent of Caucasian arrestees tested positive for the drug. (See Table 3 on page 4.)

Availability

Heroin is readily available throughout the state. Mexican black tar heroin is the most common type available; however, Mexican brown powdered heroin also is available. Since the value of heroin per ounce is higher than that of other drugs, the drug typically is smuggled into New Mexico from Mexico in small quantities to reduce the risk of significant, large-scale seizures at POEs. The USCS reported that the total amount of heroin seized at New Mexico POEs increased from approximately 1 pound in FY1999 to 17 pounds in FY2000. (See Table 5 on page 7.)

Prices and purity levels of heroin have remained relatively stable throughout New Mexico since 1999, indicating that the availability of

the drug has remained essentially unchanged. The DEA Albuquerque District Office reports that prices for Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin are \$40,000 per kilogram and range from \$1,200 to \$2,900 per ounce and \$120 to \$180 per gram. Heroin typically is less expensive in areas near the border. The DEA Las Cruces Resident Office reports that prices for Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin have remained unchanged at \$1,500 to \$2,000 per ounce. Albuquerque law enforcement personnel report that retail-level purity for both Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin generally exceeds 70 percent. Heroin purity levels in Las Cruces range from 39 to 87 percent.

Violence

There are few reported occurrences of violence associated with heroin distribution and

abuse in New Mexico. However, many prison and street gangs, who are known to commit violent

acts, are involved in the retail distribution of heroin in Albuquerque and Las Cruces. These gangs often are involved in drive-by shootings, homicides, carjackings, and home invasions,

although most of these crimes are not reported as drug-related. Heroin abusers generally are non-violent; however, some abusers commit burglary or robbery to support their addiction.

Production

Opium is not cultivated nor is heroin produced in New Mexico. Mexican black tar and brown powdered heroin are processed from opium poppies grown along the spine of the Sierra Madre in western Mexico from the tristate area of Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa to the states of

Guerrero and Oaxaca in southern Mexico. Although only approximately 2 percent of the world’s illicit opium is grown in Mexico, nearly all of it is processed into heroin and transported to the United States. Estimates place Mexican heroin production in 2000 at 2.5 metric tons.

Transportation

Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups control the transportation of Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin to New Mexico. Since the value of heroin per ounce is higher than that of other drugs, the drug typically is smuggled into the state from Mexico in small quantities to reduce the risk of significant, large-scale seizures. According to the New Mexico HIDTA, most Mexican heroin transported to New Mexico is smuggled overland across the New Mexico–Mexico border by couriers employed by Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups. These transporters generally enter New Mexico in vehicles or as pedestrians through POEs or at open, barren, remote areas between POEs. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups also use mail and parcel delivery services to transport heroin into New Mexico.

Albuquerque is a transshipment point for Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin destined for the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and the Southwest. Private and commercial vehicles equipped with hidden compartments frequently are used to transport heroin along I-10, I-25, and I-40. Interstates 10 and 40 are used to transport heroin to locations throughout the southern half of the United States. Interstate 25 provides a transportation route for drugs

from Las Cruces—approximately 30 miles north of the Texas-New Mexico border—to Denver, Colorado, and points north. Because of Albuquerque’s proximity to I-25 and I-40, transporters

Mexican DTO Transportation Cells

One investigation provided insight into the methods used by the transportation cells associated with one Mexican DTO to move Mexican black tar heroin throughout the United States. Opium poppies were processed into black tar heroin in Nayarit, Mexico, transported overland through Mexico, and smuggled across the Southwest Border into Arizona and California. The heroin then was transported by vehicle to Los Angeles, where the drug was placed in “stash houses.” It was eventually moved by courier to locations throughout the United States, including Albuquerque. The Mexican DTO employed juvenile females and 60-year-old males as couriers. Each courier transported 1 or 2 pounds of heroin per trip, either on his or her body or hidden in portable radios. In some cases, the heroin was packaged and shipped via mail services to Albuquerque and other U.S. cities.

Source: *Associated Press*, 15 June 2000.

often use locations throughout the city to store heroin for future transit and distribution.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs control the supply of heroin to New Mexico, and Mexican criminal groups often serve as wholesale distributors of the drug. Some of these groups work on behalf of Mexican DTOs through established networks and supply heroin to retail distributors located in areas throughout the state.

Retail heroin distribution is conducted by a number of criminal entities. Supplied primarily by Mexican criminal groups, retail heroin distributors vary in different areas of New Mexico. Prison and street gangs are the primary retail distributors of the drug in urban areas of the state. In the Albuquerque area, New Mexico Syndicate

often works through street gangs, such as the San Jose and Los Padillas gangs, to control heroin distribution at the retail level. The prison gang often promises street gang members protection in prison in exchange for drug distribution outside the prison. Las Cruces law enforcement officials report Barrio Azteca—a rival prison gang of New Mexico Syndicate—operates in a similar manner to conduct heroin distribution. Local independent dealers also are involved in heroin distribution. These local independent dealers typically obtain heroin from retail distributors located in the urban areas of the state and then resell the drug in rural areas.

Marijuana

Marijuana is the most readily available and most commonly abused drug in New Mexico. Most of the marijuana available in New Mexico is produced in Mexico; however, cannabis is cultivated in the state by local independent growers. While Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups dominate the transportation and wholesale

distribution of Mexico-produced marijuana throughout the state, local independent dealers control the wholesale distribution of locally produced marijuana. Mexican criminal groups, street gangs, and local independent dealers are the primary retail distributors of Mexico- and locally produced marijuana throughout New Mexico.

Abuse

Marijuana abuse is prevalent in New Mexico. Data from TEDS indicate that treatment admissions for marijuana decreased overall from 471 admissions in 1993 to 386 admissions in 1998. However, a disparity in data reporting for 1998 admissions to substance abuse treatment programs occurred and resulted in underreporting. Marijuana was the drug for which most individuals sought treatment in New Mexico during 1998.

Marijuana abuse, particularly among adolescents, continues to be a serious problem in New Mexico. According to the 1999 YRBS, 53.5 per-

cent of high school students surveyed reported lifetime use of marijuana. According to the Substance Use Among Albuquerque's Adult Population survey, 15 was the mean age of first marijuana use reported by Albuquerque resident respondents.

Marijuana use among youth and young adults is more common in New Mexico than nationwide. The 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse shows that 9.2 percent of New Mexico respondents aged 12 to 17 reported using marijuana at least once in the past 30 days compared with 7.2 percent nationwide. Of respondents aged

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18 to 25 in the state, 16.9 percent reported using marijuana at least once in the past 30 days compared with 14.2 percent nationwide.

Marijuana use is prevalent among adult male arrestees in Albuquerque. According to 2000 ADAM data, 47.3 percent of adult male arrestees

in Albuquerque tested positive for marijuana. Among male arrestees, 63.8 percent of African American, 49.4 percent of Hispanic, and 40.3 percent of Caucasian arrestees tested positive for the drug. (See Table 3 on page 4.)

Availability

Marijuana is readily available throughout New Mexico. Most of the marijuana available in the state is produced in Mexico; however, some locally produced marijuana also is available. While prices vary throughout the state, marijuana generally is less expensive in areas where Mexico-produced marijuana is abundant, such as urban areas and in locations near the border. For example, the price of marijuana averages \$350 per pound in Las Cruces and \$400 per pound in Albuquerque; however, in rural Catron County, the drug can cost as much as \$1,500 per pound. Potency levels were unavailable.

Marijuana continues to be the most prevalent drug seized by the USCS in New Mexico. The

total amount of marijuana seized at the Columbus and Santa Teresa POEs increased significantly from 37,023 pounds in FY1999, to 62,795 pounds in FY2000. (See Table 5 on page 7.) Most of the marijuana seizures in the state occur at the Columbus POE, located in Luna County. However, in July 2001 the USCS seized 2,705 pounds of marijuana at the Santa Teresa POE. The marijuana was concealed in a tractor-trailer that was transporting jalapeño peppers from Mexico. A total of 75 metal boxes containing marijuana were found in the ceiling of the tractor-trailer. The marijuana had an estimated street value of more than \$2,700,000.

Violence

There are no reported occurrences of violence associated with marijuana production and distribution in New Mexico. However, in the United States cultivators often employ armed guards to protect indoor and outdoor grow sites. Distributors commonly commit violent acts to protect their territory.

Marijuana use typically is not linked directly to violent behavior. However, ADAM data for Albuquerque reveal that 38.3 percent of males arrested for violent crimes and tested for drug use in 2000 tested positive for marijuana. ADAM 2000 data indicate that 55.6 percent of females arrested for violent crimes and tested for drug use tested positive for marijuana.

Production

Most of the marijuana available in New Mexico is produced in Mexico. Marijuana is produced throughout New Mexico to a lesser extent. Law enforcement officials statewide report that outdoor

cannabis cultivation is more common than indoor cultivation. The climate and vast, sparsely populated rural areas of New Mexico create a suitable environment for outdoor cannabis cultivation. Out-

door growers often cultivate cannabis among natural vegetation in an effort to camouflage the crop.

Ten-Acre Marijuana Field Discovered

Agents from the Region IV Narcotics Task Force discovered a 10-acre marijuana field during a “fly over” in northern New Mexico. The field was located in marshy land off New Mexico Route 58 between Cimarron and Springer. The estimated street value of the marijuana was \$250,000.

Source: *Associated Press*, 27 July 2001.

Although cannabis usually is cultivated outdoors, indoor grows have been seized by law enforcement authorities in the state. DEA supports various state and local agencies in New Mexico that participate in the Domestic Cannabis Eradication and Suppression Program (DCE/SP).

In 2000 DCE/SP seized 1,148 cannabis plants from outdoor cultivation sites, 368 cannabis plants from indoor grows, and made 15 arrests related to cannabis cultivation in New Mexico. The Las Cruces DEA/HIDTA Task Force reports that the number of cannabis grow sites has increased in southern New Mexico.

Cannabis cultivated indoors in New Mexico typically is intended for personal consumption; however, growers may employ sophisticated cultivation techniques to increase the number of cannabis plants. Furthermore, cannabis grown indoors, especially hydroponically, usually has higher THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) levels than cannabis grown outdoors. Although indoor cannabis cultivation occurs in New Mexico, hydroponic systems are uncommon.

Indoor Cannabis Cultivation

Growers may use hydroponic cultivation techniques to grow cannabis. In a hydroponic operation, marijuana is not grown in soil; instead, growers use an inert growing medium to support the plant and its root system. Some popular media include rock wool, vermiculite, perlite, and clay pellets.

Indoor Growing Techniques

Growers may automate indoor cannabis cultivation using computers and multitask controllers. Computers can be used to monitor the plants’ development as well as environmental factors, such as light, water, and temperature, and to maintain cultivation records and store customer information. Multitask automatic controllers are powered by electricity and usually are fully programmable, using timers and sensors to monitor and control the grow environment. Controllers have the advantage of being more economical and easier to use than computers. Computers that can be accessed from a separate site and multitask controllers that can be programmed require minimum oversight, allowing cannabis growers to distance themselves from cultivation sites. Electronically controlled cannabis operations also require less manpower during the growing phase.

Transportation

Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups control the transportation of marijuana into New Mexico. These DTOs and criminal groups often employ drug transporters and couriers to smuggle marijuana into the state. Marijuana frequently is transported across the Southwest Border concealed in false compartments in vehicles or intermingled with legitimate cargo. According to the

USBP, the smuggling of marijuana by couriers using backpacks and horses has increased in Luna and Hidalgo Counties.

Mexico-produced marijuana typically is transported to New Mexico from Ciudad Juarez and Palomas, Mexico; El Paso, Texas; Phoenix, Arizona; and Los Angeles, California. According to Operation Pipeline 2000 data, over 5,130

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kilograms of marijuana were seized during 68 traffic stops on New Mexico highways. The principal marijuana smuggling routes included I-10, I-25, I-40, US 54, US 84, and SR-9. In May 2000 INS and USBP agents on SR-9 in Playas seized 1,745 kilograms of marijuana from a truck with Missouri plates. When agents attempted the traffic stop, the driver failed to yield, crashed through a chain-link fence, abandoned the vehicle, and fled on foot. The 265 marijuana bundles, wrapped in cellophane and marked with their weights in kilograms or pounds, were discovered inside the truck's cargo area.

Juveniles often are used as couriers in an effort to evade detection by law enforcement authorities. According to the USCS, drug smugglers increasingly are using Las Cruces teenagers to smuggle drugs over the border into the United States. Traffickers tell them no action will be taken against them because they are so young. During 1 week in March 2000, USCS inspectors detained six juveniles on suspicion of drug smuggling. Four of the juvenile drug couriers were 16 years old, and two were 17. Allegedly, the six teenagers carried 500 pounds of marijuana valued at \$500,000.

Distribution

Various groups are involved in the wholesale distribution of marijuana in New Mexico. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups dominate wholesale distribution of Mexico-produced marijuana throughout the state. These Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups work through established networks and distribute Mexico-produced marijuana to prison and street gangs in the urban areas of the state. Though wholesale quantities of locally produced marijuana are uncommon, local independent dealers who operate

highly sophisticated cannabis cultivation operations are known to distribute the drug at the wholesale level.

At the retail level various groups are involved in the distribution of marijuana in New Mexico. Mexican criminal groups and prison and street gangs generally distribute Mexico-produced marijuana, while some local independent dealers distribute either or both types of the drug.

Other Dangerous Drugs

The other dangerous drugs (ODDs) category includes club drugs (stimulants, sedatives, and hallucinogens), psilocybin, and diverted pharmaceuticals. Currently, the threat posed by ODDs to New Mexico is minimal. Club drugs seized or purchased by law enforcement personnel in New Mexico include MDMA (3,4-methylene-

dioxymethamphetamine) and LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide). Increases in the availability and use of these club drugs have been noted by New Mexico law enforcement officials; however, the user population remains limited. The use of psilocybin and some diverted pharmaceuticals is also of concern to law enforcement authorities.

Club Drugs

MDMA, also called ecstasy, Adam, XTC, E, or X, is a synthetic psychoactive drug with amphetamine-like and hallucinogenic properties. MDMA was patented in Germany in 1914 and

sometimes was given to psychiatric patients to assist in psychotherapy. This practice was never approved by the American Psychological Association or the Food and Drug Administration. Users

say MDMA, sometimes called the hug drug, makes them feel good. However, the drug may cause psychological difficulties similar to those associated with methamphetamine and cocaine abuse including confusion, depression, sleep problems, anxiety, and paranoia. The physical effects include muscle tension, involuntary teeth clenching, blurred vision, and increased heart rate and blood pressure.

MDMA taken in high doses can be extremely dangerous. It can cause a marked increase in body temperature leading to muscle breakdown and kidney and cardiovascular system failure. MDMA use may lead to heart attack, stroke, and seizures as reported in some fatal cases at raves. Recent research links MDMA to long-term, pos-

sibly permanent, damage to parts of the brain that are critical to thought and memory. There also is evidence that individuals who develop a rash after using MDMA may suffer severe liver damage or other serious side effects.

The availability of MDMA in New Mexico has increased near college campuses, in urban areas, and in some locations near the border. Law enforcement officials in urban areas of the state report that MDMA is increasingly available. The DEA Albuquerque District Office reports that an MDMA tablet sells for \$11 at the wholesale level and \$25 at the retail level. Caucasian males generally distribute MDMA at raves, dance clubs, and nightclubs, where young people tend to gather.

Raves

Throughout the 1990s, high energy, all-night dances known as raves, which feature hard pounding techno-music and flashing laser lights, increased in popularity among teens and young adults. Raves occur in most metropolitan areas of the country. They can be either permanent dance clubs or temporary “weekend event” sites set up in abandoned warehouses, open fields, empty buildings, or civic centers. Club drugs are a group of synthetic drugs often sold at raves and dance clubs. MDMA is one of the most popular club drugs. Rave managers often sell water, pacifiers, and glow sticks at rave parties. “Ravers” require water to offset dehydration caused by MDMA; use pacifiers to prevent the grinding of teeth, which is a common side effect of using MDMA; and wave glow sticks in front of their eyes because MDMA stimulates light perception.

LSD is available and abused in the state. It is a hallucinogen that induces abnormalities in sensory perception. It is odorless, colorless, and has a slightly bitter taste. LSD is sold in tablet, capsule, and liquid form. Common street names are acid, boomers, or yellow sunshines. Effects are evident 30 to 90 minutes after taking the drug, with many users experiencing long-term disorders called flashbacks.

LSD is available but generally limited to college campuses and suburban middle and high

schools throughout New Mexico. Its popularity as a club drug has increased slightly, but overall use remains stable. Laboratory analysis reveals potencies to be approximately 60 micrograms per dose, much less than 200 to 300 micrograms commonly reported during the 1960s and early 1970s. The DEA Albuquerque District Office reports that the drug is in short supply and high demand, with a wholesale price of \$250 per 100 dosage units.

Psilocybin

Psilocybin, also known as cubes, liberty caps, magic mushrooms, mushies, mushrooms, psilocybes, and shrooms, is the psychoactive

ingredient found in certain mushrooms, notably, two Mexican species—*Psilocybe mexicana* and *Stropharia cubensis*. Hallucinogenic mushrooms

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used in religious ceremonies by the Indians of Mexico were considered sacred and were called “God’s flesh” by the Aztecs. In the 1950s the active ingredients psilocin and psilocybin were isolated from the Mexican mushrooms. Psilocin and psilocybin produce effects similar to those produced by LSD. The chemicals take effect within 20 to 30 minutes of ingestion and last about 6 hours, depending on dosage.

The physical effects of psilocybin appear within 20 minutes of ingestion and can include nausea, vomiting, muscle weakness, yawning, drowsiness, tearing, facial flushing, enlarged pupils, sweating, and lack of coordination. Other physical effects include dizziness, diarrhea, dry

mouth, and restlessness. The psychological and physical effects of the drug include changes to auditory, visual, and tactile senses. Colors reportedly appear brighter and users report a crossing of the senses; for example, “seeing a sound” and “hearing a color.”

Psilocybin mushrooms, though limited, are available in some areas of New Mexico. Law enforcement authorities in Albuquerque and Las Cruces report that psilocybin mushrooms are abused in their jurisdictions. The DEA Albuquerque District Office reports that psilocybin mushrooms from California are available for approximately \$900 per pound.

Diverted Pharmaceuticals

Pharmaceutical diversion and abuse are concerns in New Mexico, although not to the same extent as other illicit drugs. Prescription fraud by abusers, illegal sales by pharmacists, and indiscriminate prescribing by practitioners occur in the Albuquerque area. Law enforcement personnel in Albuquerque report that pharmaceuticals, particularly oxycodone (Percocet) and hydrocodone (Vicodin, Lortab) products, are being diverted, distributed, and abused in their jurisdiction. Other diverted and abused pharmaceuticals in New Mexico include Darvocet, Dilaudid, Soma, Valium, and Xanax.

Table 6. Prices of Diverted Pharmaceutical Drugs, New Mexico, 2000

Drug	Single Dose	
Darvocet N-100	\$1	per pill
Dilaudid	\$40 – \$50	per pill
Klonopin	\$5	per pill
Lortab	\$5 – \$7	per pill
Methadone	\$2	per milligram
Methylphenidate	\$2 – \$10	per pill
Percocet	\$7.50 – \$10	per pill
Soma	\$2	per pill
Valium	\$2 – \$5	per pill
Xanax	\$2 – \$5	per pill

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, El Paso Division, *Quarterly Trends in the Traffic Report, 4th Quarter-FY2000*.

Outlook

The availability and abuse of powdered and crack cocaine will continue to pose the greatest drug threat to New Mexico. Barring any changes in supply or demand, price and purity will remain relatively stable. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups will continue to dominate powdered cocaine transportation and wholesale distribution. Cuban criminal groups in Albuquerque may expand to areas outside the city in an effort to increase their crack cocaine distribution base.

Methamphetamine-related activity will most likely continue to increase throughout New Mexico. As the demand for the drug increases, local methamphetamine production will expand to new areas of the state. An increase in local production will lead to additional social, economic, and environmental costs. As a result, state and local budgets will be strained in an effort to address these associated costs.

Mexican black tar will remain the predominant type of heroin available in New Mexico. Heroin-related overdose deaths will remain a problem due to the continuing availability of high-purity heroin. The state will continue to be used as a transshipment area for heroin that is destined for other locations in the United States.

Marijuana smuggled from Mexico and locally grown cannabis will continue to pose a threat to the state. Mexico-produced marijuana will remain the most prevalent type available, but higher quality, locally produced marijuana will become increasingly available. Indoor cannabis cultivation is likely to increase as growers attempt to improve the plants' yield and produce a more potent product. For the foreseeable future, Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups will continue to dominate all facets of marijuana trafficking.

With the growing popularity of all-night dance parties, the use of club drugs—particularly MDMA—may become more of a problem throughout the urban areas and border towns of New Mexico. The potential for an increase in the number of overdoses exists as these drugs are mixed with alcohol, other drugs, or both. The perception by users that club drugs are not harmful will present a significant obstacle in the effort to reduce and prevent their use. The diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs will most likely continue to increase as drug users seek new drug alternatives. The ready availability of other dangerous drugs—particularly MDMA and diverted pharmaceuticals—in Mexico may lead to an increase in the smuggling of these drugs across the New Mexico–Mexico border.

As legitimate trade between Mexico and the United States increases, drug traffickers will continue to exploit overburdened and understaffed ports of entry. New Mexico's transportation infrastructure—especially highways—will be used heavily by drug traffickers. Overnight express mail and parcel services will continue to be used to ship drugs into and out of the state. New Mexico will continue to be a major transshipment point for illegal drugs. Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups will continue to move smaller shipments into and through the state to avoid large numbers of losses.

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McKinley County Sheriff's Department

New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA)

Region I Drug Enforcement Coordinating Council

Region II Narcotics Enforcement

Region III Drug Enforcement Task Force

Region IV Drug Enforcement Coordinating Council

Region V Multi-Jurisdictional Drug Task Force

Region VI Drug Task Force

Region VII Drug Task Force

Southwest New Mexico Task Force

Roswell Police Department

Santa Fe County Sheriff's Department

Southwest Border HIDTA

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