



Central Florida

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area

Drug Market Analysis 2009



**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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Table of Contents

Preface..... 1

Strategic Drug Threat Developments..... 2

HIDTA Overview 2

Drug Threat Overview 3

Drug Trafficking Organizations 5

Production..... 8

Transportation 10

Distribution 11

Drug-Related Crime..... 14

Abuse 14

Illicit Finance 15

Outlook 16

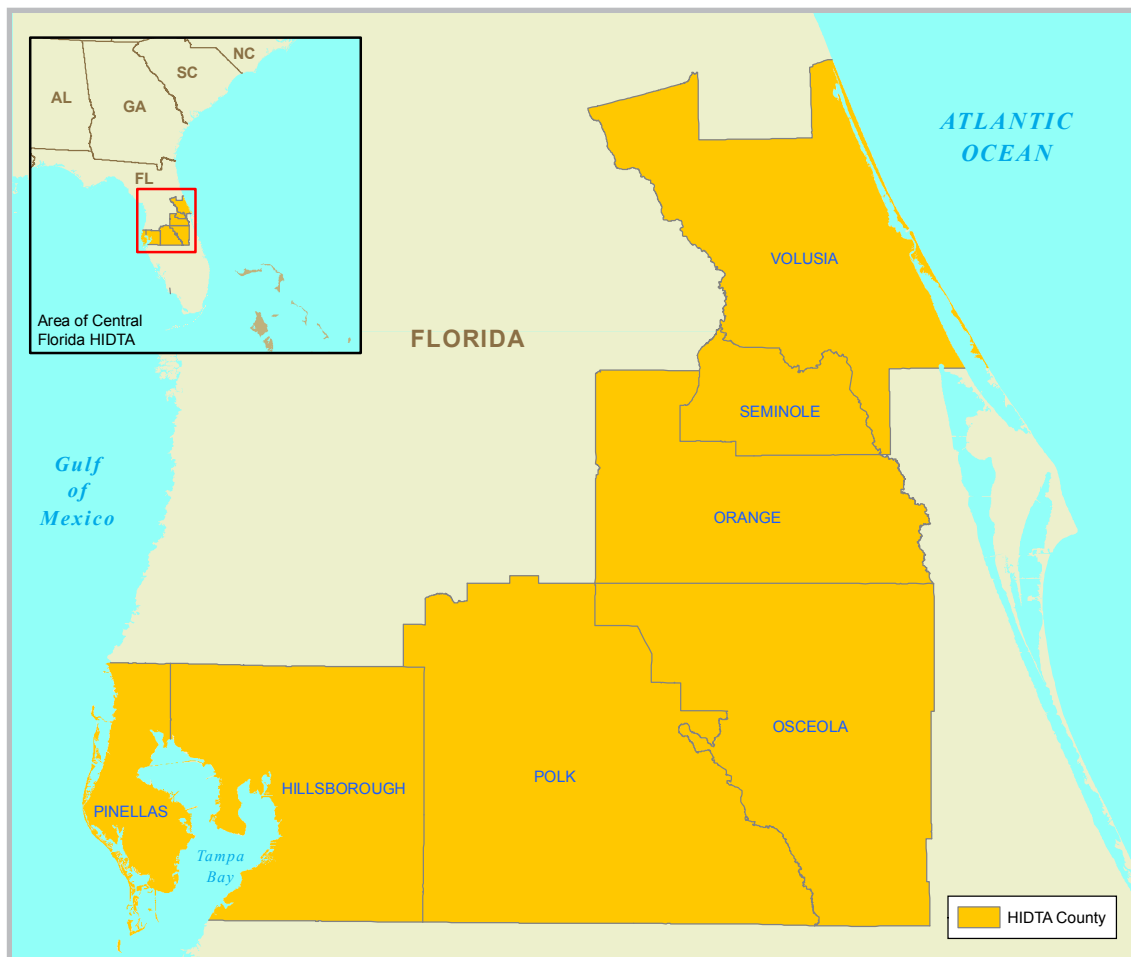
Sources..... 17

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Preface

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

Figure 1. Central Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- Cocaine trafficking and abuse pose the greatest drug threat to the Central Florida HIDTA region. Cocaine is readily available throughout most of the region's drug markets because of the region's proximity to reliable international sources of supply.
- Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and associated Hispanic criminal groups are the dominant transporters and wholesale distributors of cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and ice methamphetamine in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups also store a large number of firearms in the Tampa, Florida, area that they use to further their drug-related criminal activities and sell for profit.
- Cuban DTOs are satisfying a high and rising demand for high-potency marijuana in the region by cultivating significant amounts of cannabis at indoor grow sites; they are the primary indoor cannabis cultivators in the Central Florida HIDTA region. The number of indoor cannabis plants eradicated in the region increased from 2007 through 2008.
- The diversion, distribution, and abuse of controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) such as OxyContin (oxycodone), Vicodin (hydrocodone), and Valium (diazepam) are a significant and growing threat in the Central Florida HIDTA region.
- Distributors and abusers often travel to the Central Florida HIDTA region to illicitly obtain CPDs from numerous pain clinics and distributors. In fact, Tampa is a major source area for diverted CPDs distributed in the eastern United States. In addition, distributors and abusers throughout the United States illicitly obtain CPDs from Florida-based Internet pharmacies.

HIDTA Overview

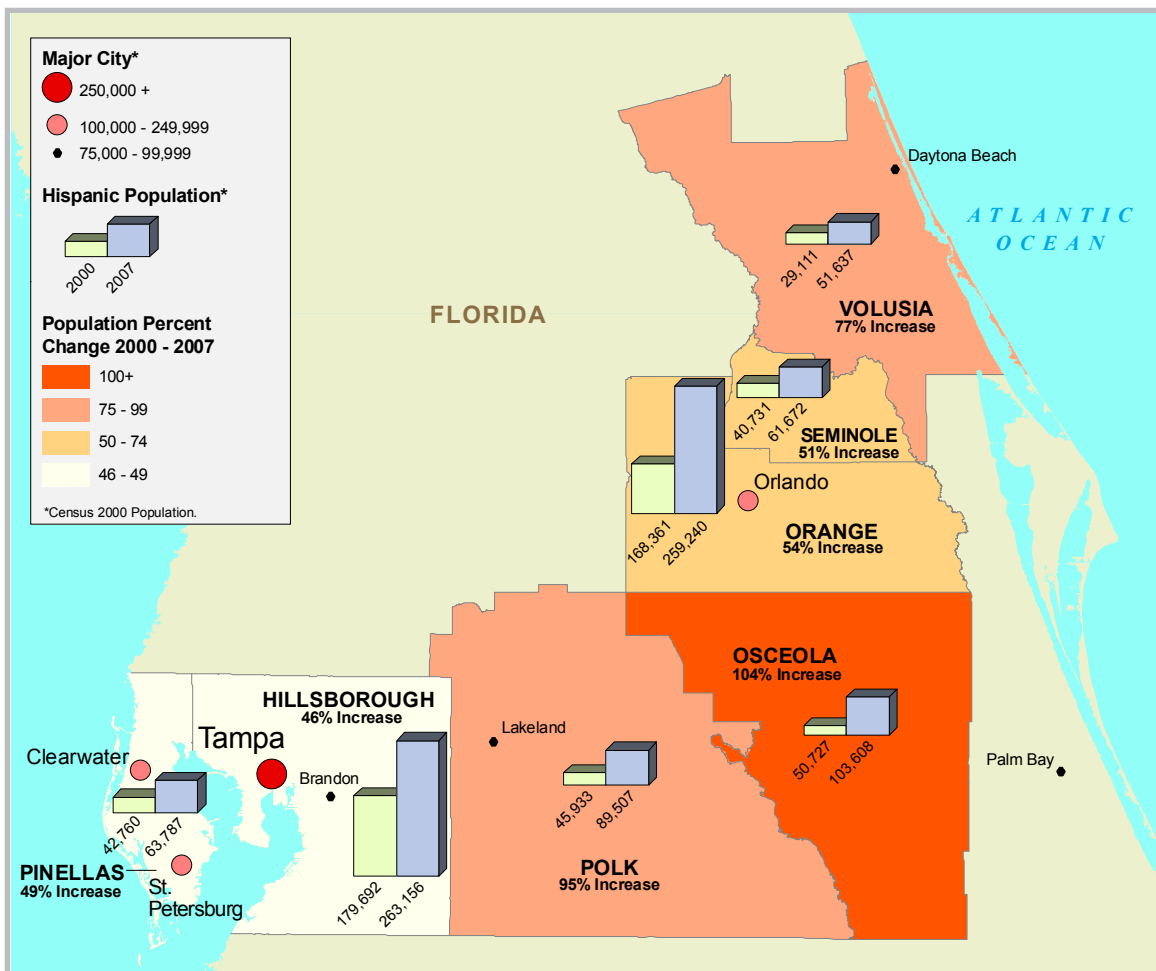
The Central Florida HIDTA region encompasses Hillsborough, Orange, Osceola, Pinellas, Polk, Seminole, and Volusia Counties. (See [Figure 1 on page 1.](#)) Daytona Beach, Orlando, and Tampa/St. Petersburg are the primary drug markets in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Drug trafficking activities in these metropolitan areas have considerable influence on smaller drug markets in central Florida, such as Largo, Sanford, and Winter Haven.

The Central Florida HIDTA region has a large and increasing population that is racially/ethnically diverse;¹ several of the region's metropolitan areas are among the fastest-growing in the country. The Hispanic population in the region, which is the fastest-growing segment, increased more than 60 percent from 557,315 in 2000 to an estimated 892,607 in 2007. (See [Figure 2 on page 3.](#)) Many foreign nationals and/or immigrants have relocated to the region from drug source or transit countries such as Jamaica and Mexico as well as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, allowing drug traffickers to blend into local communities and conceal their illegal activities.

The Central Florida HIDTA region has a highly developed transportation infrastructure composed of seaports, airports, and roadways (such as Interstates 4, 75, 95, and 275) that link it to drug source and transit areas as well as other domestic drug markets. (See [Figure 3 on page 12.](#)) The Central Florida HIDTA region is one of the world's most popular vacation destinations; approximately 140,000 travelers arrive and depart daily by automobile, airplane, bus, train, and cruise ship. This high volume of traffic allows

1. According to U.S. Census Bureau data estimates for 2007 (the latest year for which such data are available), Caucasians account for 76 percent of the Central Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) population, followed by African Americans (14%), Hispanics (11%), Asians (3%), and other races (less than 1%).

Figure 2. Estimated Hispanic Population Increase in Central Florida HIDTA Counties 2000–2007



traffickers to transport drugs into and through the area with little risk of detection. In addition, millions of tons of commercial truck and maritime freight and parcels transit the region daily.

Drug Threat Overview

Cocaine trafficking and abuse pose the greatest drug threat to the Central Florida HIDTA region, as evidenced by the high levels of violence associated with cocaine (particularly crack) distribution, the high number of cocaine-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities, and the wide availability of powder and crack cocaine. According to data from the

National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2009,² 24 of the 27 law enforcement agency respondents in the Central Florida HIDTA region report that cocaine is the greatest drug threat in their jurisdictions. Cocaine is readily available throughout most of the region’s drug markets because of the region’s proximity to reliable international

2. NDTS data for 2009 cited in this report are as of February 12, 2009. NDTS data cited are raw, unweighted responses from federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies solicited through either the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) or the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) HIDTA program. Data cited may include responses from agencies that are part of the NDTS 2009 national sample and/or agencies that are part of HIDTA solicitation lists.

sources of supply. Cocaine seizure totals reflect this availability; reporting from Central Florida HIDTA Initiatives³ indicates that more than 242 kilograms of powder cocaine and 6 kilograms of crack cocaine were seized in 2008. (See Table 1 on page 5.) The availability of cocaine in the region is in sharp contrast to the shortages noted in many other U.S. drug markets; availability continued to decrease in 14 U.S. drug markets, including Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago, Illinois; and New York, New York, through early 2008.⁴ Decreased availability of wholesale quantities of cocaine in Tampa during 2008 can be attributed to successful law enforcement efforts in the city, according to the Tampa Police Department.

The diversion, distribution, and abuse of CPDs⁵ pose a significant and growing threat to the Central Florida HIDTA region. CPDs are widely abused in the region, particularly by Caucasian adolescents and adults; law enforce-

ment and public health officials in the region report that the average age of CPD abusers is decreasing. The most widely available and commonly abused CPDs are Darvon (propoxyphene), methadone, morphine, OxyContin, Valium, Vicodin, and Xanax (alprazolam).⁶ CPD abusers are enticed in part by the ease with which they can obtain the drugs—particularly over the Internet, through doctor-shopping, or from retail-level distributors. The Central Florida HIDTA region, particularly Tampa, is a source area for CPDs available throughout a large portion of the eastern United States; abusers travel to the region to illicitly purchase CPDs from Caucasian distributors. CPDs are also diverted through Internet sales by rogue Internet pharmacies.⁷ Federal legislation designed to reduce the number of rogue Internet pharmacies selling CPDs was enacted in 2008. (See text box on page 5.)⁸

The production and distribution of marijuana, particularly marijuana produced from high-potency, indoor-grown cannabis, pose a serious threat to the Central Florida HIDTA region. Marijuana is widely available and is abused by members of all racial/ethnic and social groups. The demand for high-potency marijuana is rising in the region. The number of indoor cannabis cultivation sites being established to meet this rising demand is increasing as well. Most indoor cultivation sites are established and operated by Cuban DTOs; some indoor grow sites are operated by Caucasian and Vietnamese DTOs. Some of the high-potency marijuana available in the

3. Central Florida HIDTA funds are allocated to 10 initiatives (program areas): the HIDTA Methamphetamine Task Force, HIDTA South American/Colombian Task Force, Polk County Poly Drug Task Force, Osceola Investigative Bureau, Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, HIDTA DEA Heroin Task Force, HIDTA DEA Mexican Poly Drug Task Force, HIDTA Fugitive Apprehension Strike Team (FAST), Seminole County City Investigative Bureau, and HIDTA Investigative Support Center (ISC).
4. Intelligence and law enforcement reporting indicates that the decrease in cocaine availability in U.S. drug markets was most likely the result of several simultaneous factors that obstructed the flow of cocaine from South America through Mexico to U.S. drug markets. The probable factors include several exceptionally large cocaine seizures made while the drug was in transit toward the United States, counterdrug efforts by the Mexican Government, U.S. law enforcement operations along the Southwest Border, a high level of intercartel violence in Mexico, and expanding cocaine markets in Europe and South America. It is unclear which of these factors contributed most to the decrease in cocaine availability.
5. Not all prescription drugs are controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) under the federal Controlled Substances Act (CSA). However, many prescription drugs are listed in Schedules I through V of the CSA because of their high potential for abuse or addiction. Schedule I through V prescription drugs are primarily narcotic pain relievers and central nervous system depressants and stimulants. A complete list of CPDs, by schedule, is available on the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Office of Diversion Control web site at <http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/schedules/schedules.htm>.

6. Schedule II drugs include several prescription drugs, such as Duragesic (fentanyl), methadone, morphine, OxyContin (oxycodone), and Percocet (oxycodone in combination with acetaminophen). Schedule III drugs include several prescription drugs such as Vicodin (hydrocodone in combination with acetaminophen). Schedule IV drugs include several prescription drugs such as Ambien (zolpidem), Ativan (lorazepam), Darvon (propoxyphene), Valium (diazepam), and Xanax (alprazolam).
7. Rogue Internet pharmacies are unlicensed, fraudulent, and disreputable businesses that sell CPDs illegally.
8. The full extent of prescription drug sales from Florida-based Internet pharmacies is an intelligence gap.

The Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008

The Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008 was enacted in October 2008. This federal law amends the Controlled Substances Act and prohibits the delivery, distribution, and dispensing of CPDs over the Internet without a prescription written by a doctor who has conducted at least one in-person examination of the patient. Provisions of the law increase the criminal penalties for illegal Internet prescribing of Schedule III, IV, and V controlled substances. The law will most likely deter some Internet pharmacy operators from engaging in “script mill” practices, which provide alleged medical consultations (for a fee) and prescriptions that are sent to local pharmacies or directly to customers, who can take them to a pharmacy to be filled.

region is produced in Canada; most of the marijuana available in the region is commercial-grade marijuana transported from Mexico and Jamaica.

Methamphetamine, other dangerous drugs (ODDs)—principally MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy)—and heroin pose comparatively lower threats to the Central Florida HIDTA region. Methamphetamine availability and abuse are at relatively low levels in the region; the Tampa Police Department reports that the availability of methamphetamine has decreased in the city. The number of methamphetamine laboratories seized in the region decreased overall from 2004 through 2008. The demand for high-purity ice

methamphetamine, however, is rising. The availability and abuse of ODDs, principally MDMA, are limited in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Heroin availability and abuse are stable at low to moderate levels.

Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups are the principal drug transporters and wholesale distributors in the Central Florida HIDTA region; other DTOs and criminal groups of various races/ethnicities as well as street gangs and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) also distribute a variety of drugs throughout the region. In 2008, law enforcement officials affiliated with Central Florida HIDTA Initiatives projected to target 63 DTOs operating within the region; 21 of the organizations were dismantled, and 29 others were disrupted. Most of the DTOs (33 of the 63) operated in the local HIDTA region, 18 operated in multiple states, and 12 operated internationally. The majority of the organizations identified through the HIDTA Initiatives were Hispanic, African American, or Caucasian; one Vietnamese DTO was identified.

Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups routinely supply wholesale quantities of powder cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and ice methamphetamine to distributors in the Central Florida HIDTA region; in addition, some Mexican DTOs illegally distribute firearms in the region. Mexican DTOs are increasing their influence and control over drug distribution in the Central Florida HIDTA region and in the entire state of Florida as a result

Table 1. Central Florida HIDTA Drug Seizures, in Kilograms, 2008*

Powder Cocaine	Crack Cocaine	Ice Methamphetamine	Powder Methamphetamine	Marijuana	Hydroponic Marijuana	Heroin	MDMA (in dosage units)
242	6	12	6	4,153	5,628	5	19,298

Source: Central Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

*Seizures of hashish, CPDs, and methamphetamine precursors are not included in this table.

of their access to sources of supply and their well-established drug smuggling routes from Mexico to the United States and from California, the Southwest Border area, and Atlanta to locations throughout Florida. Consequently, these organizations are able to efficiently transport and distribute large quantities of illicit drugs into and through the Central Florida HIDTA region. The control exercised by these tightly coordinated and compartmentalized organizations and groups is facilitated by the growing Hispanic population in central Florida. Mexican traffickers easily assimilate into local Hispanic communities, where they can conceal their drug trafficking activities, including those conducted in jurisdictions bordering the Central Florida HIDTA region. Moreover, Mexican DTOs rely upon strong familial ties in Mexico and west central Florida to further facilitate their drug trafficking operations in the region. Members of Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups are increasingly establishing residency in upscale suburban and rural farm communities, where they store and distribute illicit drugs and firearms and consolidate drug proceeds.

Colombian DTOs are significant transporters and distributors of powder cocaine and limited quantities of South American (SA) heroin. They transport these drugs from southern Florida or from South America directly into the Central Florida HIDTA region for distribution in local drug markets. These traffickers typically transport powder cocaine and SA heroin from southern Florida using vehicles or package delivery services and from South America using couriers aboard aircraft or maritime vessels.

Cuban DTOs establish and operate numerous indoor high-potency cannabis grow sites in the Central Florida HIDTA region and have expanded such operations throughout the southeastern United States. These organizations often purchase real estate in central Florida for the sole purpose of indoor cannabis cultivation. In addition, Cuban DTOs frequently use illegal immigrants from

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.

Cuba and other Caribbean locations to work at the grow sites.

Puerto Rican DTOs distribute limited wholesale quantities of SA heroin and cocaine in the Central Florida HIDTA region. They also illegally transport firearms from Florida to Puerto Rico, most likely for use by other members of the organization and for sale to other criminals. Puerto Rican DTOs dominate the retail-level distribution of SA heroin in the Orlando metropolitan area—one of the few areas in the continental United States where Puerto Rican criminals control a drug market. They also provide large quantities of SA heroin to Puerto Rican distributors in the greater New York City area and, to a lesser extent, Puerto Rican DTOs operating in cities along the eastern seaboard. Moreover, Puerto Rican DTOs transport cocaine, heroin, and marijuana into the region using package delivery services.

Other DTOs and criminal groups of various races/ethnicities, including African American,

Bahamian, Caucasian, Dominican, Honduran, and Jamaican groups, transport and distribute limited wholesale quantities of drugs in the Central Florida HIDTA region; many also distribute the drugs at the midlevel and retail level in the region. Some of these traffickers obtain powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, and marijuana from Mexican DTOs that operate in the HIDTA region. African American criminal groups typically distribute crack cocaine, marijuana, and MDMA at the retail level. Bahamian, Dominican, and Honduran DTOs distribute limited wholesale quantities of powder cocaine in the region. Caucasian DTOs and criminal groups distribute cocaine, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine, CPDs, and ODDs; they also cultivate cannabis. Jamaican DTOs transport and distribute wholesale quantities of cocaine and marijuana obtained from suppliers in southern Florida and the Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) HIDTA region; they have occasionally used ties with Mexican DTOs located along the Southwest Border to obtain wholesale quantities of cocaine and marijuana for distribution in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Jamaican DTOs also distribute cocaine and marijuana in retail drug markets in the region.

Asian DTOs, including some of Vietnamese ethnicity, distribute limited quantities of high-potency Canadian marijuana, MDMA, and CPDs on a limited basis in the Central Florida HIDTA region; they also produce small quantities of high-potency marijuana at indoor grow sites. Law enforcement officials report that Asian DTOs, when active, are typically affiliated with larger Asian criminal networks that extend throughout the United States and Canada. These organizations are generally based upon familial or other direct social relationships and are difficult for law enforcement to infiltrate.

Street gangs, both nationally affiliated and locally based, distribute illicit drugs at the retail level in many areas of the Central Florida HIDTA region; their level of drug distribution

is generally low to moderate. African American street gangs are the primary retail distributors in urban areas of the region, and Hispanic street gangs are the primary retail distributors in suburban areas. Most street gangs in the region are violent, operate in a defined area or turf, and are homogeneous, typically reflecting the racial/ethnic population of the areas in which they operate. Most gang-related violence is the result of gang rivalries or disputes over drug territories; however, some violence occurs among members of the same gang, prompted by jealousy or acts of theft. Violent encounters also occur between street gangs and other DTOs. Instances of such rivalry and violence have increased in the past year, most likely the result of reductions in drug territory caused, in part, by the encroachment of Mexican DTOs into areas previously controlled by street gangs. Increased violence during the past year also reflects the limited but rising presence of nationally affiliated racially and ethnically based criminal groups and street gangs in the region. Moreover, some street gangs trade illicit drugs for firearms, elevating the threat of violence in the region.

Nationally affiliated and local street gangs are increasingly active in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Nationally affiliated street gangs such as Crips, 52 Hoover Crips, Latin Kings, and Sureños 13 are expanding drug distribution activities, particularly those involving crack cocaine and marijuana, at the retail level in the region. The Volusia County Sheriff's Office reports that in addition to distributing illicit drugs, Latin Kings members are increasingly becoming involved in violent crime. Local street gangs including Campestre, Drak, Dirty South Mafia, Quince, and Westside Locos typically distribute powder and crack cocaine, marijuana, and other illicit drugs at the retail level in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Most street gangs are composed of members with similar racial/ethnic backgrounds, although some have memberships that consist of

Florida House Bill 43—Criminal Activity

On June 30, 2008, the governor of Florida signed into law House Bill (HB) 43 to address the growth of street gangs in Florida. Primary provisions of the bill include a gang kingpin statute that mandates a first-degree felony punishable by life imprisonment for initiating, organizing, or financing criminal gang-related activity. The bill also established new offenses under Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) provisions to reflect common gang behavior such as “fleeing to elude” or “accessory after the fact” and prohibits the use of electronic communications to further the criminal interests of a gang. An additional provision allows for civil injunctions against convicted gang members who knowingly associate with other criminal gang members or associates.

Source: Florida Attorney General’s Office.

African American and Hispanic individuals; most are established and based upon street or neighborhood affiliations. Local street gangs commonly adopt multiple facets of the gang culture from national-level street gangs, often from information found on the Internet, but typically do not have ties to those national-level gangs. Many local street gangs in the region are formed for a collective pursuit of profits derived from illicit drug distribution or simply for protection from ethnically driven violence.

OMGs such as Outlaws and Warlocks, support clubs such as Black Pistons and Kingsmen, and other local clubs distribute illicit drugs in the Central Florida HIDTA region to a limited extent. OMGs typically distribute cocaine, powder methamphetamine, and marijuana in the region. They transport drugs into the region for distribution from sources throughout the United States as well as Canada, the Caribbean, and Mexico.

Production

Illicit drug production in the Central Florida HIDTA region primarily involves the conversion of powder cocaine to crack, cannabis cultivation, and small-scale powder methamphetamine production. Crack cocaine conversion takes place principally in urban areas of the region. Cannabis cultivation and small-scale methamphetamine production often take place in rural areas in the western portion of the Central Florida HIDTA region.

Retail-level crack cocaine distributors, typically members of local street gangs, convert powder cocaine to crack near intended markets, most of which are located in urban areas of the region. The conversion and distribution of crack are serious concerns to law enforcement officials, since these activities are frequently associated with high levels of abuse and related property crime and violence. Local street gang members generally distribute crack on an as-needed basis, typically in ounce quantities, because federal sentences for distribution or possession of crack are more severe than those for powder cocaine.

High-potency marijuana and commercial-grade marijuana are produced in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Most of the high-potency marijuana available in the region is produced locally at indoor grow sites, and some of the commercial-grade marijuana available in the region is produced at a limited number of outdoor grow sites.⁹ Caucasian DTOs and criminal groups typically operate the limited number of outdoor grow sites in the region, generally on rural lands. Most of the indoor cannabis grow sites are established and operated by Cuban DTOs and criminal groups; some Caucasian and Vietnamese DTOs and criminal groups also cultivate cannabis indoors.

9. According to Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) data, 947 cannabis plants were eradicated from 39 outdoor grow sites in the Central Florida HIDTA region in 2008.

Table 2. Indoor Cannabis Cultivation Sites Seized and Plants Eradicated in Central Florida HIDTA Counties, 2005–2008

County	2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated
Hillsborough	6	567	5	348	5	493	55	5,298
Orange	3	84	3	55	4	268	10	296
Osceola	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0
Pinellas	17	1,143	14	519	14	479	47	2,636
Polk	13	986	7	768	38	4,213	36	2,259
Seminole	5	304	5	342	5	1,067	5	494
Volusia	0	0	1	16	20	1,594	16	1,240
Total HIDTA Region	44	3,084	35	2,048	87	8,122	169	12,223
Total Florida	367	43,727	480	36,172	944	74,698	1,022	78,489

Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement; Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

Indoor cannabis cultivation is prevalent throughout Florida and the Central Florida HIDTA region. According to data from the Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), the total number of indoor cannabis plants eradicated in the Central Florida HIDTA region increased from 2007 through 2008. (See Table 2.) FDLE and the Central Florida HIDTA report that marijuana producers continue to move cannabis cultivation operations indoors to avoid law enforcement detection and to increase the quality of the marijuana produced. Most indoor grow operations in the region are very similar in design, featuring controlled environments that take advantage of sophisticated growing techniques, such as hydroponics; these techniques typically yield high-potency marijuana, which commands higher prices.¹⁰ For example, in the Central Florida HIDTA region, the wholesale

price for commercial-grade marijuana in 2008 ranged from \$550 to \$650 per pound, while the wholesale price for hydroponic marijuana ranged from \$3,000 to \$3,500 per pound. Moreover, indoor cannabis operations can be conducted year-round, yielding four to six harvests per year, compared with the two harvests per year that are typical for outdoor cultivation.

Many of the indoor grow sites in the Central Florida HIDTA region are located in residences, such as rental houses and apartments, in suburban and rural communities between Orlando and Tampa. Further, the depressed housing market throughout Florida has resulted in increased home foreclosures, a circumstance that provides opportunities for DTOs to acquire bargain-priced properties that can be used to expand their indoor cannabis grow operations in the region. Rental houses or apartments are used as short-term cannabis grow sites. The DTOs and criminal groups, primarily Cuban DTOs, that establish these indoor grow sites often require the illegal immigrants of various races/ethnicities who cultivate the plants to live at the sites; this arrangement provides the appearance of typical

10. According to the University of Mississippi Potency Monitoring Project, the average THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) content of marijuana samples submitted to federal, state, and local law enforcement officials in the Central Florida HIDTA as of September 30, 2008 (the latest date for which such data are available) was 7.5 percent.

residential activity at the sites and is accepted by the DTOs as reimbursement for the illegal passage of these individuals into the United States. In response to the increasing number of residences used for indoor cannabis cultivation, the state legislature passed Florida HB 0173 into law on June 17, 2008.¹¹

Cuban DTOs that operate high-potency indoor cannabis grow sites in the Central Florida HIDTA region began their operations in southern Florida and later expanded northward throughout the state. These DTOs have further expanded their operations into other areas of the southeastern United States, such as Georgia and North Carolina. Law enforcement reporting and seizure data indicate that Cuban DTOs are now the principal producers of high-potency marijuana at indoor grow sites in the southeastern United States. Moreover, intelligence derived from recent law enforcement investigations reveals that cannabis cultivation by Cuban growers has advanced from the operation of a limited number of grows by independent Cuban groups for a relatively small profit, to a coordinated effort by these groups to operate large-scale indoor cannabis grow sites.

Caucasian independent producers operate a limited number of small-scale powder methamphetamine laboratories in the Central Florida HIDTA region. According to National Seizure System (NSS) data, the number of methamphetamine laboratories seized in Central Florida HIDTA counties decreased overall from 2004 through 2008. (See Table 3.) The Central Florida HIDTA reports that local methamphetamine producers in the adjacent counties of Pasco, Manatee, Lake, and Brevard impact the HIDTA region. Moreover, most of the methamphetamine

Table 3. Methamphetamine Laboratories Seized in the Central Florida HIDTA Region, 2004–2008

County	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Hillsborough	3	5	1	1	0
Orange	9	9	2	8	6
Osceola	3	8	4	1	8
Pinellas	1	3	1	0	0
Polk	5	4	0	2	3
Seminole	1	0	1	1	0
Volusia	2	8	7	5	2
Total in HIDTA Region	24	37	16	18	19

Source: National Seizure System, data run on February 18, 2009.

laboratories seized had been using the anhydrous ammonia method (commonly referred to as the Birch or Nazi method) of production. Less than 2 ounces of methamphetamine could be produced in these laboratories per production cycle. The Volusia County Sheriff’s Office reports that methamphetamine production in the county is limited because of legislative controls, implemented in 2006, that restrict precursor chemical sales.

Transportation

DTOs use various methods and means of conveyance to transport illicit drugs into, through, and from the Central Florida HIDTA region. These traffickers frequently transport wholesale quantities of illicit drugs to the Central Florida HIDTA region for local distribution; some of these drugs are further transported to other drug markets in northern and southern Florida as well as to drug markets on the East Coast. Illicit drugs are transported into the region from other areas of Florida as well as Arizona, California, Georgia, Puerto Rico, and Texas. They are also transported from countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru.

The Central Florida HIDTA region’s highly developed transportation infrastructure is routinely

11. Florida House Bill 0173 prohibits the cultivation of cannabis for specified purposes and prohibits owning, leasing, or possessing a place, structure, or trailer, or other described place with the knowledge that it will be used to manufacture, sell, or traffic in a controlled substance. The bill also provides that possession of 25 or more cannabis plants is prima facie evidence of intent to sell or distribute.

exploited by drug traffickers to transport cocaine, SA heroin, Mexican heroin, Mexican marijuana, and ice methamphetamine into the region from locations along the Southwest Border. The most common method of transportation is the use of private and commercial vehicles on Interstates 4, 75, 95, and 275. Traffickers primarily use independently owned commercial trucks and private or rental vehicles to transport multihundred-kilogram quantities of powder cocaine and marijuana, which they commingle in shipments of legitimate goods or conceal in hidden compartments. These DTOs sometimes transport illicit drug proceeds back to the Southwest Border area using the same conveyances and routes.

Traffickers of various races/ethnicities transport illicit drugs into the Central Florida HIDTA region. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine, Mexican heroin, Mexican marijuana, and ice methamphetamine from the Southwest Border area. Asian DTOs operating in the region typically use private vehicles and package delivery services to transport drugs (principally high-potency marijuana) from Canada, states near the U.S.–Canada border, and sometimes California to central Florida for distribution. Colombian and Puerto Rican DTOs and criminal groups transport cocaine and SA heroin from southern Florida, the Caribbean, and South America into and through the region. Jamaican DTOs and criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine and marijuana from southern Florida and the Puerto Rico/USVI HIDTA region into central Florida. African American criminal groups transport powder and crack cocaine and marijuana into the region.

Traffickers transport illicit drugs into the Central Florida HIDTA region using the U.S. Postal Service and package delivery services; they also use couriers to transport some drugs on commercial flights and maritime conveyances. Drug traffickers and some abusers frequently transport illicit drugs such as marijuana, metham-

phetamine, and CPDs through package delivery services. Moreover, the Orlando International Airport¹² and the Port of Tampa¹³ provide drug traffickers with additional opportunities to transport illicit drugs from Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico, and South America into the region.

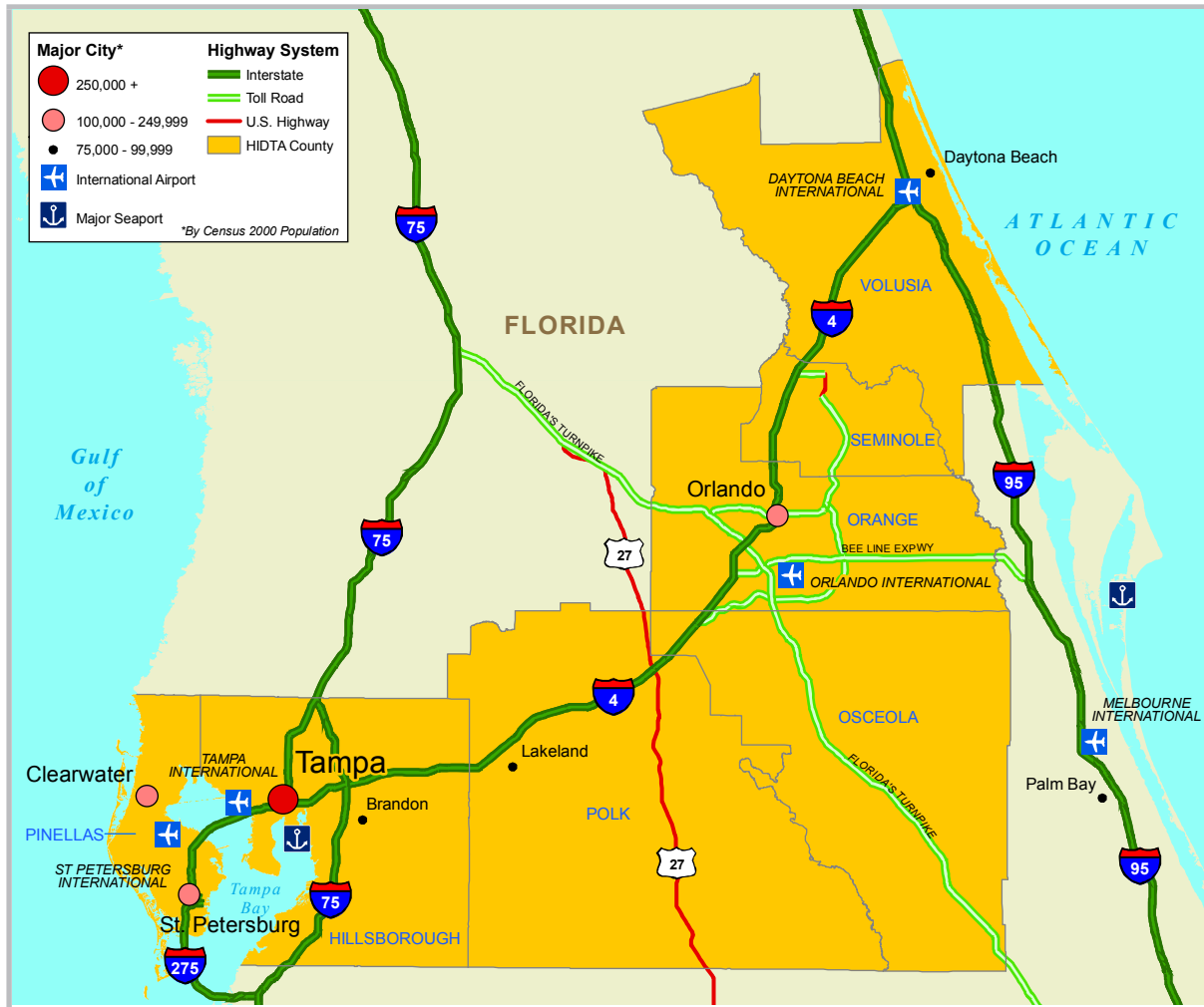
Distribution

Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups dominate the wholesale-level and midlevel distribution of powder cocaine, heroin, ice methamphetamine, and Mexican marijuana in the Central Florida HIDTA region; other DTOs and criminal groups of various races/ethnicities distribute limited wholesale quantities of drugs. Mexican DTOs supply these drugs to most other wholesale, midlevel, and retail-level distributors, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups have expanded their illicit drug operations into suburban and rural communities, where drugs are often stored in residences for eventual midlevel distribution to criminal groups, street gangs, and local independent dealers.

12. Orlando International Airport is the largest airport in Florida, the thirteenth-largest airport in the United States and the twenty-third-largest airport in the world, ranked by the number of passengers during 2006 (the latest year for which such data are available), according to Airports Council International. During 2006, Orlando International Airport was the eighth-fastest-growing major airport in the United States and the twentieth-fastest-growing major airport in the world in a ranking of the 30 airports with the highest traffic volume. Orlando International Airport is the fourth-largest origin and destination market in the United States; it provided scheduled nonstop service to 84 destinations in the United States and 16 international cities. Orlando International Airport recorded approximately 35.8 million passengers for the fiscal year (FY) that ended September 30, 2007, an increase of 3.1 percent from the previous year.

13. The Port of Tampa is an international trade seaport in west central Florida, the largest deepwater seaport in Florida, and the closest full-service seaport to the Panama Canal. In FY2007 (the latest year for which such data are available), the seaport's public marine terminals handled a total of 50 million tons of bulk and general cargo. The Port of Tampa offers maritime repair facilities, fisheries, and nontraditional and traditional retail and entertainment uses; it is also a major cruise ship terminal.

Figure 3. Central Florida HIDTA Transportation Infrastructure



Various DTOs, criminal groups, and local independent dealers distribute illicit drugs at the midlevel and retail level in the region (see Table 4 on page 13); their methods of operation change little from year to year. Retail-level distribution typically takes place at open-air drug markets, in local clubs, in apartment buildings, in local motels, in vehicles, at college residence halls, on local beaches, and at prearranged meeting sites such as parking lots. The Orange Blossom Trail (also known as OBT) is a notorious retail drug distribution area in Orlando. Ice methamphetamine is typically not distributed in open-air markets, because of the erratic behavior often displayed

by methamphetamine abusers; methamphetamine distributors usually deliver the drug directly to abusers at their residences or other locations that receive limited law enforcement and public scrutiny. Retail quantities of most drugs are typically packaged in sandwich bags, pill bottles, plastic wrap, or duct tape. CPDs are obtained by abusers who doctor-shop or from unscrupulous doctors; some of these drugs are sold to other abusers for profit. Local or out-of-state abusers may conduct such transactions in person or order drugs through the Internet using package delivery services. Law enforcement officials and drug treatment providers report that Tampa is becoming a source city for diverted CPDs.

Table 4. Drug Distribution Activities in the Central Florida HIDTA Region, 2008

Group	Wholesale Distribution	Midlevel Distribution	Retail Distribution
African American	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder and crack cocaine, marijuana, MDMA	Powder and crack cocaine, marijuana, MDMA, CPDs
Asian/Vietnamese	High-potency marijuana	High-potency marijuana	High-potency marijuana, MDMA, CPDs
Bahamian	Cocaine	NA	NA
Caucasian	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, CPDs, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine	Powder cocaine, CPDs, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine
Colombian	Powder cocaine, heroin	NA	NA
Cuban	High-potency marijuana	High-potency marijuana	NA
Dominican	Powder cocaine, high-potency marijuana	High-potency marijuana	High-potency marijuana
Hispanic (Other)	Powder cocaine, heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine, MDMA	Powder cocaine, heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine, MDMA	Powder cocaine, heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine, MDMA
Honduran	Powder cocaine	NA	NA
Jamaican	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, marijuana
Mexican	Powder cocaine, heroin, ice methamphetamine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, marijuana
Puerto Rican	Powder cocaine, heroin	Powder cocaine, heroin	Powder cocaine, heroin

Source: Central Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

NA—Not applicable.

Traffickers facilitate drug sales in the Central Florida HIDTA region using electronic communications, usually cellular telephones and the Internet. Some DTOs are using relatively advanced electronic communication methods and are changing “SIM cards” (subscriber identity modules) in an effort to hinder law enforcement investigations. Drug traffickers typically use disposable cellular telephones as well as those that are activated through prepaid calling cards. Most traffickers use such phones for a limited time to reduce the risk of having conversations monitored by law enforcement personnel. Traffickers also prefer to conduct drug-related conversations on cellular telephones with point-to-point capabilities, believing that these communications are

difficult for law enforcement to intercept. Drug distributors use cellular telephones to facilitate prearranged meetings with individuals to conduct drug sales. They also use the text messaging capabilities of these telephones to communicate and arrange meetings. Further, some drug transactions are conducted through instant messaging capabilities on the Internet. Draft e-mail messages written and saved to a shared account are also used by some individuals to facilitate drug sales through the Internet. These messages can be accessed by any organization member using a predetermined password, thus avoiding the necessity of actually transmitting an e-mail message that may be intercepted by law enforcement personnel.

Drug-Related Crime

High levels of violent crime and property crime in the Central Florida HIDTA region are associated with the distribution and abuse of illicit drugs, particularly crack cocaine.¹⁴ According to data from the NDTs 2009, 17 of the 27 law enforcement agency respondents in the Central Florida HIDTA region report that crack cocaine is the drug that most contributes to violent crime in their jurisdictions. Law enforcement officials report that much of the violence in the Central Florida HIDTA region is a result of conflicts among rival drug distributors, particularly street gangs, over increasingly limited drug markets.

Firearms obtained in Florida for use in local, national, or international criminal activities are of significant concern to law enforcement officials in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Law enforcement officials in central Florida report that firearms, which are frequently purchased, traded, or stolen by drug traffickers, are often destined for criminal use in Mexico and Puerto Rico. For instance, 15 members of a criminal organization were indicted in Tampa in March 2008 on 36 federal violations, including acquiring firearms illegally in Florida and subsequently transporting them to Puerto Rico. Members of this organization purchased firearms from licensed dealers in Florida and, without the knowledge of the licensed dealers, resold the weapons to convicted felons who had ties to DTOs on the island. According to law enforcement officials, the members knew that the weapons would be used for drug trafficking and other criminal activities.

14. Many crimes perpetrated in the Central Florida HIDTA region have a drug nexus; however, such crimes are not specifically defined as drug-related by law enforcement or public agencies operating in the region. Nonetheless, the Central Florida HIDTA estimates that between 50 and 80 percent of violent crimes in the HIDTA region are drug-related.

Abuse

Marijuana is the primary illicit substance identified in treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Florida; however, the most severe drug-related societal and personal consequences are often associated with powder and crack cocaine (the second most identified illicit substance in treatment admissions). According to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), the number of marijuana-related treatment admissions in Florida from 2003 through 2007 (the latest year for which data are available) exceeded the number of treatment admissions for the abuse of cocaine; other opiates, tranquilizers, and sedatives; heroin; or amphetamines (which include methamphetamine).¹⁵ (See Table 5 on page 15.) Moreover, 46.6 percent of marijuana-related treatment admissions in 2007 involved individuals aged 12 to 17.

CPDs are increasingly available and frequently abused in the Central Florida HIDTA region. The most commonly abused CPDs are Darvon, methadone, morphine, OxyContin, Valium, Vicodin, and Xanax. Law enforcement officials in the Central Florida HIDTA region report that the availability and abuse of CPDs are significant threats because of the associated death rates. Florida medical examiner data reveal that the number of deaths associated with CPDs, used either alone or in combination with other drugs,¹⁶ exceeded the number of deaths associated with cocaine and heroin in the Central Florida HIDTA counties of Hillsborough, Orange, Osceola, Pinellas, Polk, Seminole, and Volusia during 2007 (the latest full year for

15. Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) data are available only at the state level; thus, the number of admissions is not limited to the Central Florida HIDTA region but reflects the entire state of Florida.

16. More than one drug type may be associated with each deceased person because of mixed drug toxicities.

Table 5. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities in Florida, 2003–2007

Drug	2003	2004*	2005	2006	2007
Marijuana	20,129	30,489	10,652	13,322	12,918
Cocaine (by all routes of administration)	16,648	21,511	8,918	11,074	9,736
Opiates, tranquilizers, and sedatives	4,253	6,321	2,504	4,315	4,341
Heroin	4,021	4,227	1,222	1,782	1,184
Amphetamines (including methamphetamine)	1,022	1,753	893	1,051	815

Source: Treatment Episode Data Set, as of January 7, 2009.

*Florida changed its methodology for reporting treatment admissions to TEDS between 2004 and 2005, resulting in a significant decline in the number of reported treatment admissions in 2005. (Public health officials believe that significant duplicate admissions were taking place under the prior reporting mechanism.) As such, trend analysis cannot be conducted for years prior to 2005.

which data are available). (See Table 6 on page 16.) Moreover, law enforcement and public health officials in the region report that the average age of CPD abusers in the region is decreasing.

Methamphetamine, ODDs, and heroin are abused at low to moderate levels throughout most of the Central Florida HIDTA region. Law enforcement officials report that most methamphetamine abusers are Caucasian and that methamphetamine abuse levels, while low, are increasing because of the rising availability of high-purity ice methamphetamine. ODDs available in the region, particularly MDMA, are generally abused in combination with other substances, including alcohol, cocaine, and marijuana. MDMA is most commonly used by youths in the region. Heroin is abused by a wide variety of individuals; availability and abuse are stable at low to moderate levels.

Illicit Finance

The movement of illicit proceeds from wholesale drug distribution in the Central Florida HIDTA region typically involves the transportation of bulk currency from the region to the Southwest Border, southern Florida, the Caribbean, or South America. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups are the primary transporters of bulk currency, often concealing it in

the same private and commercial vehicles used to transport drugs into the area. DTOs that transport wholesale and midlevel drug quantities often use criminal groups to transport bulk currency to money laundering cells in southern Florida. The drug proceeds are then laundered through financial institutions and other methods, such as the Colombian Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE).¹⁷

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

Table 6. Drug Mentions in Deceased Persons in the Central Florida HIDTA Region, 2003–2007

Drug	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Prescription benzodiazepines and narcotics	1,054	1,163	1,202	1,464	1,887
Cocaine	485	556	676	710	838
Heroin	103	64	80	25	49

Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement; Florida Medical Examiners.

Traffickers operating in the Central Florida HIDTA region also launder proceeds from drug distribution by purchasing real estate and luxury items, using money services businesses, structuring bank deposits, and commingling drug proceeds with revenue generated by cash-intensive businesses such as auto repair shops, auto dealerships, auto auctions, and hair salons. For instance, Cuban DTOs frequently invest drug profits in residential properties that they use to house indoor cannabis grow sites in the region. Retail-level distributors in the HIDTA region typically use their drug proceeds to purchase tangible items such as real estate, vehicles, and jewelry.

Outlook

The dominance that Mexican DTOs exert over wholesale cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and ice methamphetamine distribution in the Central Florida HIDTA region is unlikely to be challenged by other DTOs in the near term. As the Hispanic population in the region expands, Mexican traffickers will assimilate into those communities and will easily mask their drug distribution operations. In fact, Mexican DTOs may become more entrenched in the Central Florida HIDTA region and may continue to expand their distribution operations in Florida and other areas as they gain additional market exposure. These DTOs will increasingly exploit firearms in the United States for use in national and international drug-related activities.

The number and size of indoor cannabis grow sites will quite likely increase during the next year as Cuban DTOs and other local producers seek to profit from the rising demand for high-potency marijuana in the Central Florida HIDTA region. Cuban DTOs will continue to use illegal immigrants to work at indoor cannabis grow sites. Moreover, an abundance of low-cost real estate available in the region as a result of declining economic factors will quite likely provide marijuana producers with increased potential for expansion of their indoor grow operations.

Established CPD diversion networks in central Florida, particularly Tampa, will continue to supply CPDs to distributors and abusers throughout the eastern United States. Compounding this situation are illicit Internet pharmacies operating in Florida, including those in the Central Florida HIDTA region. However, the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008 will most likely deter some Internet pharmacy operators. CPD-related deaths, particularly among youths, may increase as the average age of CPD abusers in the region decreases and these younger abusers increasingly use CPDs alone and in combination with other drugs.

Sources

Local, State, and Regional

Altamonte Police Department
 Apopka Police Department
 Bartow Police Department
 Casselberry Police Department
 City of Tampa Police Department
 City of Winter Haven Police Department
 Clearwater Police Department
 Daytona Beach Police Department
 Volusia Bureau of Investigation
 Eagle Lake Police Department
 Edgewood Police Department
 Haines City Police Department
 Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office
 Holly Hill Police Department
 Kissimmee Police Department
 Osceola County Investigative Bureau
 Lake Alfred Police Department
 Lake County Sheriff's Office
 Lakeland Police Department
 Lake Mary Police Department
 Largo Police Department
 Longwood Police Department
 Maitland Police Department
 Mulberry Police Department
 New Smyrna Beach Police Department
 Volusia Bureau of Investigation
 Ocoee Police Department
 Orange County Sheriff's Office
 Orlando Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation
 Orlando Police Department
 Ormond Beach Police Department
 Osceola County Sheriff's Office
 Osceola County Investigative Bureau
 Oviedo Police Department
 Pasco County Sheriff's Office
 Pinellas County Sheriff's Office
 HIDTA Task Force
 Pinellas Park Police Department
 Plant City Police Department
 Polk County Sheriff's Office
 Port Orange City Police Department
 Sanford Police Department
 Seminole County Sheriff's Office
 City-County Investigative Bureau
 South Daytona Police Department
 State of Florida
 Department of Corrections

Florida Department of Law Enforcement
 Domestic Marijuana Eradication Indoor Grow
 Program
 Medical Examiner's Commission
 Highway Patrol
 Contraband Interdiction Unit
 Office of Drug Control
 St. Cloud Police Department
 St. Petersburg Beach Police Department
 St. Petersburg Police Department
 Tampa Police Department
 Tarpon Springs Police Department
 Volusia Bureau of Investigation
 Volusia County Sheriff's Office
 Winter Haven Police Department
 Winter Park Police Department
 Winter Springs Police Department

Federal

Executive Office of the President
 Office of National Drug Control Policy
 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
 Central Florida
 U.S. Department of Commerce
 U.S. Census Bureau
 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 National Institutes of Health
 National Institute on Drug Abuse
 University of Mississippi
 Potency Monitoring Project
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 Administration
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 U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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 El Paso Intelligence Center
 National Seizure System
 Federal Bureau of Investigation
 Uniform Crime Report
 U.S. Attorneys Office
 Middle District of Florida
 U.S. Marshals Service
 U.S. Postal Service

Other

Airports Council International

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**Questions and comments may be directed to
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