



## **New Mexico**

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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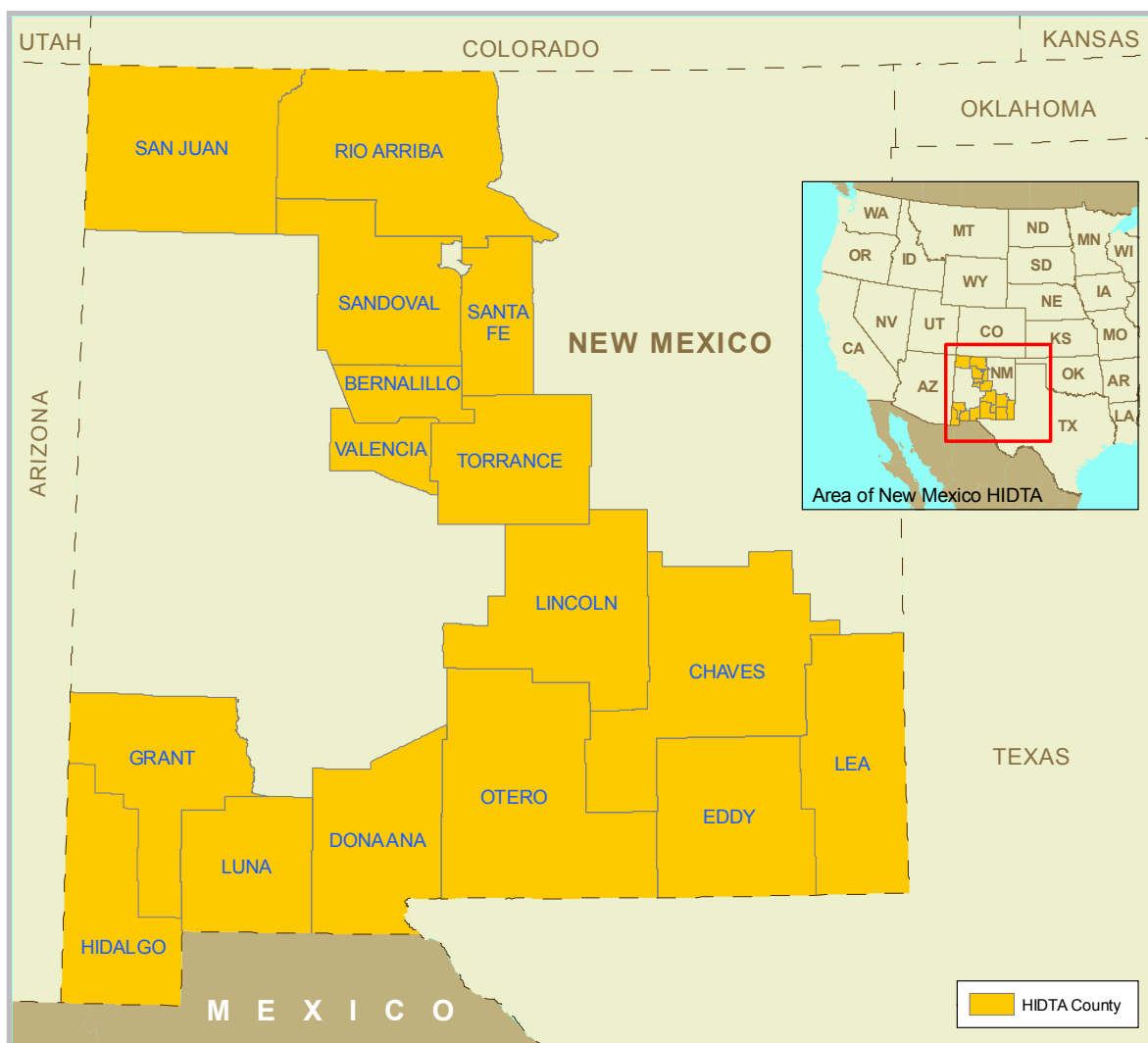
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# Preface

This assessment provides a strategic overview of the illicit drug situation in the New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region, 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 New Mexico HIDTA.

**Figure 1. New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area**



## Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- The distribution and abuse of Mexican ice methamphetamine pose the principal illicit drug threats to the New Mexico HIDTA region. Local methamphetamine production is also problematic, but the magnitude of the threat is minimal in comparison with the distribution and abuse of Mexican ice methamphetamine.
- Some New Mexico-based drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are rerouting some drug shipments that they traditionally shipped from Mexico through Texas to new smuggling routes through Arizona and, to a lesser extent, California because of intense law enforcement pressure and high levels of violence in the El Paso, Texas/Juárez, Mexico, plaza.<sup>1</sup>
- Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are using children from Mexico who attend school in the New Mexico HIDTA region to smuggle drugs from Mexico into New Mexico.
- More methamphetamine laboratories were seized in New Mexico HIDTA counties in 2008 than in 2007, quite likely the result of decreased availability of ice methamphetamine produced in Mexico.
- Mexican DTOs use any means to smuggle illicit drugs into the region from Mexico; recently they have begun to use low-flying aircraft, such as ultralights, to transport illicit drugs into New Mexico.

## HIDTA Overview

The New Mexico HIDTA region is composed of 16 counties—seven in northern New Mexico and nine in southern New Mexico (see [Figure 1 on page 1](#))—and has a population of more than 1.6 million.

1. Plazas are specific cities or geographic locations along the U.S.–Mexico border that are used to smuggle illicit drugs from Mexico into the United States.

U.S. Census data indicate that nearly 50 percent of the population resides in either Bernalillo County (615,099 residents) or Dona Ana County (193,888); other significant population centers are the counties of Santa Fe (142,407), San Juan (126,473), and Sandoval (113,772). Albuquerque is New Mexico's largest city, with approximately 504,949 residents; other major cities are Farmington, Las Cruces, Roswell, and Santa Fe. (See [Figure 2 on page 3](#).) Although the population in New Mexico, and in the HIDTA region specifically, is relatively small, the region's proximity to Mexico and transportation infrastructure, as well as the presence of well-established DTOs with direct links to Mexican cartels, ensure its role as a principal drug smuggling area and transshipment and distribution center for illicit drugs available in the HIDTA region and many other U.S. drug markets. For example, New Mexico-based Mexican traffickers supply drug markets in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and South Carolina.

Southwestern New Mexico—specifically Hidalgo, Luna, and Dona Ana Counties—shares a 180-mile border with Mexico. More than half the length of this border is desolate public land that contains innumerable footpaths, roads, and trails. Additionally, many ranches are located along the border. These factors and minimal law enforcement coverage make the area an ideal smuggling corridor for drugs and other illicit goods and services—primarily alien smuggling into the United States and weapons and bulk cash smuggling into Mexico. Mexican DTOs smuggle multihundred-kilogram quantities of illicit drugs through this portion of the HIDTA region annually. Smaller quantities of illicit drugs are smuggled from Mexico through Texas into the HIDTA region, a significant change from the last 2 years, when Texas was the preferred route for illicit drug smuggling into New Mexico. Intense law enforcement pressure and high levels of violence over the last 2 years, principally in the El Paso/Juárez plaza, have resulted in many New

**Figure 2. New Mexico HIDTA Region Transportation Infrastructure**



Mexico-based DTOs’ rerouting some of their drug shipments through Arizona and, to a lesser extent, California for further transport to Albuquerque and Las Cruces as well as to the Four Corners, Espanola Valley, and southeastern regions of the HIDTA region. (See Figure 2.) For example, U. S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers seized significantly more heroin at the Nogales port of entry (POE) in 2008 than they had in previous years, a development they attribute to a shift in heroin smuggling routes away from Juárez in favor of the Sonora corridor, where levels of violence and law enforcement presence are comparatively minimal.<sup>2</sup> Once the drugs reach New Mexico areas,

2. The state of Sonora, Mexico, is just south of the Nogales port of entry (POE) in Arizona, through which increasing quantities of heroin are smuggled and appear to be destined for stash houses in the Phoenix, Arizona, area—an active staging area for Mexican black tar and brown powder heroin, much of which is transshipped to New Mexico.

shipments typically are divided into smaller quantities and transshipped and/or distributed throughout New Mexico and to other locations throughout the United States.

Interstates 10, 25, and 40; many major U.S. highways; and secondary and tertiary roadways traverse New Mexico, connecting it to major drug markets throughout the country. For example, I-25 extends from the U.S.–Mexico border in New Mexico to Colorado, while Interstates 10 and 40 connect the HIDTA region to drug markets in Arizona, California, Oklahoma, and Texas, and as far east as Florida. The highway infrastructure is conducive to private and commercial transit, which plays a significant role in the New Mexico economy. (See Figure 2.) As a result, the flow of illicit drugs to and through



the HIDTA region is significant. The New Mexico Motor Transportation Division (MTD) alone seized 19,187 kilograms of illicit drugs in 2008—an amount that does not account for the significant quantities of illicit drugs seized by other law enforcement entities in the HIDTA region or the amount that is successfully transported to and through the area. Commercial motor vehicle carriers, buses, trains, commercial and private aircraft, package delivery services, and mail services also are used by traffickers to smuggle illicit drugs to and through the area, to varying degrees.

## Drug Threat Overview

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups based in New Mexico are closely aligned with drug cartels in Mexico, providing local DTOs and criminal groups with large quantities of illicit drugs that they smuggle into the New Mexico HIDTA region for distribution. These DTOs and criminal groups have also forged relationships with street gangs, prison gangs, and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) that they supply with illicit drugs for retail distribution in communities throughout the HIDTA region.

The distribution and abuse of Mexican ice methamphetamine pose the principal illicit drug threats to the New Mexico HIDTA region. Local methamphetamine production is also problematic, but the magnitude of the threat is minimal in comparison with the distribution and abuse of Mexican ice methamphetamine. The distribution and abuse of cocaine, marijuana, and Mexican black tar heroin and, to a lesser extent, Mexican brown powder heroin also pose significant law enforcement challenges. Fifteen of the 29 respondents to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2009 in the New Mexico HIDTA region report that ice methamphetamine is the greatest drug threat in their jurisdictions. The remainder report that powder cocaine (4), marijuana (3), powder methamphetamine (3), heroin (2),

and crack cocaine (2) are the greatest drug threats in their jurisdictions. All of these respondents indicate that other drugs, including a variety of controlled prescription drugs (CPDs), are also problematic.<sup>3</sup>

Law enforcement officers assigned to New Mexico HIDTA task force initiatives seized more marijuana (95,190 kg) than any other illicit drug each year from 2004 through 2008. (See Table 1 on page 5.) The 2008 marijuana seizure totals were significantly lower than 2007 amounts—a finding consistent with law enforcement reporting in the HIDTA region that attributes much of this decrease to the ongoing DTO conflicts in Juárez, which impeded the flow of marijuana and other illicit drugs (particularly cocaine and methamphetamine) through the El Paso/Juárez plaza.

The flow of other illicit drugs into the HIDTA region, including heroin, CPDs, and MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy), was not similarly impacted by cartel violence in Mexico; the quantities of each of these drugs that were reported seized by officers assigned to HIDTA task forces increased substantially in 2008. (See Table 1 on page 5.) The increase in the amount of heroin seized can be explained in part by successful infiltration of some major Mexican heroin smuggling organizations by New Mexico law enforcement officials—a significant accomplishment because most heroin trafficking operations are close-knit, multigenerational family organizations that are difficult to penetrate. Another explanation for the increase in the amount of heroin seized in the New Mexico HIDTA region, particularly in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and the Espanola Valley area, is the increasing demand for and availability of

3. National Drug Threat Survey (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) High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (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.

**Table 1. Illicit Drugs Seized in the New Mexico HIDTA Region, in Kilograms, 2004–2008**

Drug Type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Marijuana	115,181	86,840	125,168	119,617	95,190
Powder cocaine	1,362	556	1,796	726	808
Crack cocaine	1	NA	2	2	5
<b>Total cocaine</b>	<b>1,363</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>1,798</b>	<b>728</b>	<b>813</b>
Powder methamphetamine	148	104	98	89	96
Ice methamphetamine	5	NA	NA	10	1
<b>Total methamphetamine</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>97</b>
Heroin	11	38	25	15	56
MDMA*	NA	1,477	86	2,620	5,015
OxyContin*	NA	NA	3	401	5,603
Other CPDs*	1,597	3,756	2,777	2,574	7,808

Source: New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Performance Management Process Database.

\*In dosage units

NA—Not available

the drug in these areas. This increase occurred at the same time that the demand for controlled prescription oxycodones,<sup>4</sup> particularly OxyContin, increased. OxyContin and other CPDs are diverted in many different ways from a variety of sources, both in the United States and Mexico. MDMA availability is typically not associated with Mexico and/or Mexican DTOs; MDMA is usually smuggled from Canada to the region, often through western and midwestern states.

## Drug Trafficking Organizations

Highly sophisticated Mexican DTOs and criminal groups pose the most formidable law enforcement challenges to the New Mexico HIDTA region. New Mexico-based Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are closely aligned with the most significant DTOs in Mexico—principally the Juárez, Sinaloa, and Gulf Cartels. They successfully exploit these relationships to maintain control of illicit drug smuggling into the HIDTA region and wholesale

distribution of these drugs locally and in markets outside the region in states such as Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and South Carolina. For example, Mexican DTOs based in Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Durango, Mexico, that control much of the heroin smuggling into New Mexico work closely with their counterparts in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, the Four Corners area, and the Espanola Valley area to smuggle wholesale quantities of heroin into the region for transshipment and further distribution. Similarly, members of Mexican DTOs in Sonora and Chihuahua, Mexico, work closely with their counterparts in New Mexico to smuggle and distribute marijuana; Mexican DTOs from the state of Michoacán and their counterparts in Las Cruces and other New Mexico cities smuggle wholesale quantities of cocaine to and through the area for distribution.

Law enforcement officials supporting New Mexico HIDTA initiatives arrested members of 231 DTOs<sup>5</sup> in 2008, down from 316 in 2007. Most of the arrests in 2008 involved Mexican (95) or Mexican American (55) criminals who

4. Controlled prescription oxycodones are often preferred to heroin by many abusers who want a more reliable dosage unit.

5. Two of these trafficking groups specialized in money laundering.

ran international (60), multistate (66), or local (105) drug trafficking operations. Many of the criminals were polydrug traffickers who distributed more than one type of drug at a time, most often methamphetamine (127), cocaine (103), marijuana (90), heroin (23), CPDs (7), and/or MDMA (1).

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups often compartmentalize duties to ensure that their operations are tightly controlled. DTO members often have a strong sense of loyalty, particularly since many are family members or close friends. This loyalty makes detection by law enforcement more difficult. Although Mexican DTOs and criminal groups typically rely on well-established smuggling routes and techniques, they readily change routes and modify techniques to adapt to law enforcement actions. Additionally, Mexican DTOs and criminal groups have a low tolerance for disobedience by their members, particularly at the highest levels, and severely punish those individuals who are disloyal or disobey instructions.

Law enforcement reporting indicates that Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are exploiting school age children, typically by using children from Mexico who attend schools in the New Mexico HIDTA region to smuggle illicit drugs. For example, in 2008 a teenage boy who had smuggled illicit drugs from Mexico into New Mexico on behalf of the Sinaloa Cartel was lured by another teenage boy into a remote area of New Mexico and shot to death on orders of the DTO for which he worked; he allegedly owed the cartel money.

Mexican DTOs have also forged associations with members of street gangs, prison gangs, and OMGs to facilitate the distribution of illicit drugs in the HIDTA region. A number of street and prison gangs smuggle, transport, and/or distribute illicit drugs and commit violent crimes in the New Mexico HIDTA region; however, their drug operations generally are more limited than those of

## 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.

Mexican DTOs and local Mexican criminal groups. When gangs smuggle illicit drugs from Mexico into New Mexico, they often do so at the request or with the approval of Mexican DTO members. Some of the most noteworthy gangs active in New Mexico are the Barrio Azteca prison gang (most prominent in El Paso and Las Cruces), West Siders (from Sunland Park, New Mexico), Los Carnales and SNM prison gangs and Los Sureños and Juaritos street gangs (from central New Mexico), 72 Gang (from Colonia Anapra, Chihuahua), Los Demonos (from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua), Memphis Boys, Los Padillas, and Servalles Pajarito (south of Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico).

## Production

Illicit drug production in the New Mexico HIDTA region primarily involves small-scale methamphetamine production, cannabis cultivation, and the conversion of powder cocaine to crack cocaine. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups in Jalisco,

Sonora, and Sinaloa, Mexico, produce most of the methamphetamine available in the New Mexico HIDTA region. However, Mexican DTOs, criminal groups, and local independent traffickers are increasingly producing the drug in the HIDTA region. According to El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) National Seizure System (NSS) data, law enforcement officers in New Mexico HIDTA counties seized more methamphetamine laboratories in 2008 (42)<sup>6</sup> than in 2007 (12), a noticeable shift from annual declines in local methamphetamine production since at least 2003.<sup>7</sup> Most of the laboratories seized each year since 2003 were discovered in Bernalillo County. (See Table 2.) Declines in local production prior to 2008 are attributed to stringent precursor chemical control regulations, successful law enforcement efforts and public awareness campaigns in the United States, and increased availability of ice methamphetamine produced in Mexico. However, Mexican authorities prohibited ephedrine and pseudoephedrine imports into Mexico in 2008 and issued a ban on the use of both chemicals in Mexico in 2009. As a result, the availability of Mexican ice methamphetamine in New Mexico (and other U.S. locations) has declined, forcing many distributors to cut the drug to stretch supplies. For example, methamphetamine in the New Mexico HIDTA region historically had been 80 to 90 percent pure at the wholesale level but is currently only 40 to 50 percent pure. Some law enforcement officials report that methamphetamine abusers who were accustomed to high-purity ice methamphetamine are now attempting to produce their own personal-use quantities of methamphetamine. Most methamphetamine production recipes are readily available on the Internet for methods including “one-pot” (also referred to as “Lord Almighty,” “Crash,” or “Shake and Bake”), red phosphorus, and Nazi; all of these production methods are relatively easy and can yield high-purity methamphetamine.

6. This figure does not include the number of chemicals, equipment, or dumpsite seizures, which are also associated with methamphetamine production.

7. Very few methamphetamine laboratories have been seized outside the 16 HIDTA counties.

**Table 2. Methamphetamine Laboratories Seized by New Mexico HIDTA County, 2003–2008**

HIDTA County	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Bernalillo	69	48	30	19	3	22
Chaves	0	3	0	0	1	1
Dona Ana	9	6	0	1	0	0
Eddy	0	0	0	1	0	0
Grant	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hidalgo	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lea	4	2	1	0	0	3
Lincoln	1	0	0	0	0	0
Luna	0	0	0	0	0	0
Otero	9	1	1	1	0	1
Rio Arriba	1	1	0	0	0	0
Sandoval	13	9	2	1	3	2
San Juan	4	0	1	0	0	0
Santa Fe	2	2	2	2	2	3
Torrance	2	0	4	1	2	2
Valencia	8	14	1	0	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>State of New Mexico</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>45</b>

Source: National Seizure System, as of January 4, 2009.

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups based in the Mexican states of Guerrero, Michoacán, Nayarit, Oaxaca, and Zacatecas produce most of the marijuana available in the New Mexico HIDTA region; however, small quantities of cannabis are cultivated locally—usually on federal public lands around the Rio Grande River.

Cuban, African American, and Hispanic criminal groups and street gangs are the principal crack producers in the New Mexico HIDTA region. In Albuquerque (Bernalillo County), the largest crack cocaine market in New Mexico, Cuban criminal groups control about half of the crack conversion and distribution. In Hobbs

(Eddy County), the second-largest crack market, African American criminal groups are the principal crack converters. Crack distributors throughout the HIDTA region typically convert powder cocaine into crack cocaine in low-income inner-city neighborhoods on an as-needed basis, primarily to avoid the harsh penalties associated with possession and distribution of large quantities of the drug.

## Transportation

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are the principal transporters of drugs to and through the New Mexico HIDTA region. These DTOs and criminal groups control plazas along the U.S.–Mexico border in New Mexico that they use to smuggle wholesale quantities of illicit drugs into the HIDTA region. Once in southern New Mexico, these traffickers and those who work on their behalf typically use Interstates 10, 25, 40, 54, 60, 180, and 380 to further transport illicit drugs to numerous U.S. drug markets. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are increasingly smuggling illicit drugs to the area from Mexico through Arizona and, to a lesser extent, California. The amount of illicit drugs smuggled to the area from Mexico through Texas has diminished significantly.

Mexican traffickers also employ a significant number of backpackers and use pack animals to cross the border with illicit drugs (often marijuana), particularly in the Boot Heel region and farming areas west of Columbus, in the southwest portion of the state. The backpackers usually drop their drug loads at predetermined locations in the desert and walk to a waiting vehicle. Other DTO members later pick up the drugs and transport them to nearby stash houses for distribution. Mexican traffickers also use pack animals to transport drugs across the border.

### Insole-Shaped Heroin Interdicted

On June 24, 2008, a New Mexico Department of Public Safety officer stopped the driver of a sport-utility vehicle (SUV) traveling north on I-25 near Raton, New Mexico (just south of the New Mexico-Colorado border), for a traffic violation. The driver was a resident of El Paso, but the vehicle was registered to him at a Phoenix, Arizona, address. Inspection of the vehicle by a Raton Police Department drug-detection canine alerted the officers to the rear bumper. Upon removing the bumper, officers discovered 16.3 kilograms of heroin hidden inside a compartment constructed under the floor of the rear cargo area. The heroin was sealed in 24 plastic packages, each containing a thin, flat block of compressed powder heroin that had been formed into the shape of a shoe insole. This method is an increasingly popular way to conceal heroin. The driver indicated that he was en route to Chicago, Illinois, from Phoenix.

Source: New Mexico Department of Public Safety.

Drug traffickers from many other states drive to New Mexico to purchase their drug supplies and then return home. For example, methamphetamine distributors and abusers from Colorado often travel to Farmington (located in the Four Corners region of New Mexico) to purchase wholesale quantities of methamphetamine and other illicit drugs for distribution or abuse in Colorado from Mexican DTOs operating in the area.

Drug traffickers also smuggle illicit drugs to and through the international airports situated in or near the New Mexico HIDTA region or transport illicit drugs to and through the region using rail, bus, package delivery services, and mail. Law enforcement reporting indicates that “mules” transport drugs on one-way commercial flights into Albuquerque, Phoenix, and southern California, where they purchase one-way tickets on Amtrak to major

cities in the east and north. DTOs also smuggle illicit drugs into New Mexico using low-flying aircraft, such as ultralights. Most of these aircraft fly low to avoid radar detection and often land at one of the numerous ranches in the region.

## Distribution

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups control the wholesale distribution of illicit drugs in the New Mexico HIDTA region. (See Table 3.) They supply illicit drugs to distributors within the region and in many other drug markets throughout the country, including Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colorado; Las Vegas, Nevada; Memphis, Tennessee; Miami, Florida; New York, New York; Omaha, Nebraska; Phoenix; Salt Lake City, Utah; Seattle, Washington; St. Louis, Missouri; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Yakima, Washington; and Washington, D.C. These transactions are facilitated through well-established relationships with close friends and family members and associations with other traffickers in these markets.

Drug traffickers often prearrange their drug transactions—with both suppliers and customers—using standard phones, multiple cell phones, direct-connect devices, mobile phones, prepaid telephones, push-to-talk telephones, satellite phones, the Internet, and two-way radios. They frequently discontinue service for their cell phones and replace them (sometimes every few weeks) to avoid law enforcement interdiction. Traffickers typically use several communication methods when coordinating individual aspects of the same drug transactions. For example, they may text-message a picture of a meeting place, use the Internet to identify a date and/or time for the transaction, and use a cell phone to describe the color/make/model of a transport vehicle. The text-messaging of photographs is extremely challenging for law enforcement officers, who have historically traced only verbal communications between traffickers. Traffickers are fully aware of law enforcement intercept capabilities and usually make out-of-country calls on digitally encrypted phones. Although DTOs and street gang

**Table 3. Wholesale-Level Drug Distributors in the New Mexico HIDTA Region**

Distributors	Drugs Distributed
Mexican DTOs and criminal groups	Powder cocaine, Mexican black tar heroin, Mexican brown powder heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine
Caucasian DTOs and criminal groups	MDMA, CPDs, marijuana
Street gangs	Powder and crack cocaine, Mexican black tar heroin and brown powder heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine
Prison gangs	Powder and crack cocaine, Mexican black tar heroin and brown powder heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine
Outlaw motorcycle gangs	Methamphetamine, marijuana
Local independent dealers	Methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, marijuana

Source: New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

members have coordinated drug transactions using cell phones for years, this communication method reportedly has recently gained popularity among prison gang members who are smuggling cell phones into prisons to further their criminal enterprises. In addition, gang members are “netbagging” (using the Internet and social web sites) to promote their gang cultures and attract new members for drug trafficking and other illicit purposes.

Local Mexican traffickers and African American and Hispanic street gangs are the primary retail distributors of powder and crack cocaine, Mexican black tar and brown powder heroin, marijuana, and ice methamphetamine in the New Mexico HIDTA region. Caucasian criminal groups and independent dealers, prison gangs, OMGs, and other criminal groups and independent dealers also distribute illicit drugs at the retail level in the region, albeit on a smaller scale. (See Table 4 on page 10.)

**Table 4. Retail-Level Drug Distributors in the New Mexico HIDTA Region**

Distributors	Drugs Distributed
Local Mexican traffickers and African American and Hispanic street gangs	Powder and crack cocaine, Mexican black tar heroin and brown powder heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine, CPDs
Caucasian criminal groups and independent dealers	Powder and crack cocaine, Mexican black tar heroin, marijuana, ice methamphetamine, MDMA, CPDs
Outlaw motorcycle gangs	Ice methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin, cocaine, MDMA
Prison gangs	Ice methamphetamine, Mexican black tar heroin and brown powder heroin, cocaine, marijuana

Source: New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

## Drug-Related Crime

Many DTOs in the New Mexico HIDTA region also engage in other crimes, including alien smuggling, auto theft, kidnapping, murder, and weapons smuggling to further their criminal enterprises and generate illicit proceeds. DTOs assault and murder rival traffickers and individuals who cannot pay their drug debts. A significant portion of this violence occurs in Mexico; however, some of the violence has already spread into New Mexico. For example, in January 2009, members of a rival DTO shot and killed a drug trafficker in a remote area of Silver City, New Mexico, for failure to pay a drug debt. The wife of another drug trafficker who owed a drug debt was also murdered; her body was discovered a week later near that same location. Many of these violent traffickers obtain firearms by burglarizing businesses, private homes, and vehicles in the New Mexico HIDTA region. Additionally, some Mexican DTOs are generating extra income through home invasion robberies in New Mexico communities. In the summer of 2008, central

New Mexico experienced a spike in home invasions (six home invasions in a 2-month period) targeting Mexican households with suspected drug trafficking ties.

Street and prison gang members also commit high levels of violent crime in the New Mexico HIDTA region, including assault, murder, robbery, theft, and witness intimidation. Most of these crimes are attributed to turf battles over drug distribution territories. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the New Mexico Gang Task Force, much of the violence committed in New Mexico is attributed primarily to drug-related activities involving gangs. However, no agency collects gang-related crime statistics by county in the HIDTA region.

Many drug abusers in the New Mexico HIDTA region—particularly methamphetamine abusers—commit property crimes and identity theft to acquire money to purchase their illicit drug supplies. According to statistics from the Federal Trade Commission, in 2007 (the latest year for which data are available), New Mexico ranked ninth in the number of identity theft victims—with 1,732 victims, or 87.5 victims per 100,000 residents. Approximately 75 percent of victims’ complaints involved employment-related fraud, credit card fraud, bank fraud (checking and savings accounts and electronic funds), phone or utility fraud, and government documents or benefits fraud.

## Abuse

Illicit drugs—predominantly heroin and methamphetamine—are abused at high levels in the New Mexico HIDTA region, as reflected in the high numbers of treatment admissions, drug-related hospitalizations, and drug-caused deaths that occur within the region and throughout the state each year. The need for drug abuse treatment frequently exceeds the availability of treatment resources in the state.

### Methamphetamine Abuse on the Navajo Indian Reservation

Methamphetamine has become a serious problem on the Navajo Indian Reservation, particularly in the Shiprock District (the New Mexico portion of the reservation). In fact, methamphetamine abuse by individuals of all age groups supplanted the abuse of alcohol and marijuana in 2005, and that is still the case today. As a result, the Navajo Nation criminalized the distribution, possession, and use of methamphetamine on the reservation in accordance with state and federal drug laws.

Source: New Mexico Investigative Support Center.

Heroin abuse is endemic in the Upper Rio Grande and Espanola Valley areas of New Mexico, which encompass portions of Bernalillo, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe Counties. In the Rio Arriba County communities of Abiquiu, Alcalde, Chimayo, and Espanola, multigenerational heroin abuse is common. Children of these users often start abusing the drug as teenagers. Their parents and grandparents usually abuse and often distribute the drug. According to the New Mexico Department of Health, Rio Arriba County has the highest per capita drug-caused death rates in the state.

Methamphetamine is abused at high levels in Farmington, Kirtland, and Bloomfield (San Juan County); Deming, Lordsburg, and Silver City (southwest New Mexico); and Artesia, Carlsbad, Roswell, Lovington, and Hobbs (southeast New Mexico). High levels of methamphetamine abuse in Farmington and San Juan County have also negatively impacted the nearby Navajo Indian Reservation, which straddles New Mexico and Arizona.

### Illicit Finance

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups—the primary money launderers in the New Mexico HIDTA region—often smuggle bulk quantities of cash and monetary instruments generated through their drug trafficking activities into Mexico using private and commercial vehicles. Bulk proceeds from other drug markets such as Chicago and Denver also transit the New Mexico HIDTA region en route to Mexico. DTOs also smuggle bulk drug proceeds from the HIDTA region into Mexico using private and commercial aircraft and express shipping services. Once in Mexico, the proceeds are typically deposited into Mexican financial institutions, including *casas de cambio* (exchange houses) and banks, for eventual physical transport back to the United States or electronic movement through wire transfers and are subsequently declared as legal funds. Other criminal groups, street gangs, OMGs, prison gangs, and independent dealers also transport drug proceeds in bulk from the region, but to a lesser extent than Mexican DTOs and criminal groups.

Mexican and other DTOs and criminal groups exploit traditional financial institutions and money services businesses (MSBs) in the New Mexico HIDTA region by transferring vast sums of illicit funds to international locations, including Mexico. Over 200 financial institutions are located in Las Cruces, including banks and other MSBs. Many of these businesses operate from private residences, are uninsured, and are used solely for laundering drug proceeds.

DTOs and criminal groups, primarily Mexican, in the New Mexico HIDTA region also launder drug proceeds through money transmittal businesses located in their own communities. Some transfer funds using small, local transmittal businesses or commercial businesses such as Western Union; others operate private transmittal businesses to further their criminal enterprises. Owners of the large number of money transmittal



businesses in the HIDTA region serve the sizable Hispanic population in the area by legitimately wiring money to requesters' family members in Mexico, a situation that helps those who use the services for illicit purposes to more easily blend with the high volume of legal transfers.

Traffickers in the New Mexico HIDTA region also regularly launder illicit proceeds through a variety of other methods. They commonly commingle illicit proceeds with funds from legitimate businesses such as restaurants, automobile or tire shops, retail stores, and real estate companies; traffickers also purchase high-value assets with the funds and use gaming casinos to launder drug proceeds. They are also using the Internet more often to launder money via electronic pay systems or to transfer funds between accounts. The anonymity afforded by Internet transactions allows traffickers to launder drug proceeds with minimal risk of law enforcement detection.

## Outlook

Mexican DTOs that traditionally smuggle drugs through the El Paso/Juárez plaza will most likely seek alternative routes to avoid confrontations with Mexican Government counterdrug forces and rival DTOs by shifting some of their smuggling activities to the U.S.–Mexico border in New Mexico. As a result, it is quite likely that drug-related violence in U.S. communities along the border in New Mexico will increase as law enforcement officials and rival traffickers respond to the shifts in smuggling routes.

The number of small-scale methamphetamine laboratories in the New Mexico HIDTA region will most likely increase in the near term. Mexican DTOs, criminal groups, and local independent traffickers are likely to intensify their domestic methamphetamine production activities within the HIDTA region to counter the decreased availability of Mexican ice methamphetamine caused by enhanced precursor chemical restrictions in Mexico.

Illicit drug abuse, particularly the abuse of heroin and methamphetamine, in the New Mexico HIDTA region will remain at high levels. Multi-generational heroin abuse, methamphetamine abuse in Native American communities, and an abundant supply of these drugs render the New Mexico HIDTA region vulnerable to sustained high levels of abuse.

## Sources

### Local, State, and Regional

Alamogordo Department of Public Safety  
 Albuquerque Police Department  
 Albuquerque Sheriff's Department  
 Artesia Police Department  
 Aztec Police Department  
 Belen Police Department  
 Bernalillo County Sheriff's Department  
 Bernalillo Police Department  
 Bloomfield Police Department  
 Carlsbad Police Department  
 Corrales Police Department  
 Deming Police Department  
 District Attorney's Offices  
   Judicial Districts  
     First  
     Second  
     Third  
     Fifth  
     Sixth  
     Eleventh  
     Twelfth  
 Dona Ana County Sheriff's Department  
 Eddy County Sheriff's Department  
 Espanola Police Department  
 Eunice Police Department  
 Farmington Police Department  
 Grant County Sheriff's Department  
 Hidalgo County Sheriff's Department  
 Hobbs Police Department  
 Jal Police Department  
 Las Cruces Police Department  
 Lea County Sheriff's Department  
 Los Alamos Police Department  
 Los Lunas Police Department  
 Lovington Police Department  
 Luna County Sheriff's Department  
 New Mexico Department of Corrections  
 New Mexico Department of Health  
 New Mexico Department of Public Safety  
 New Mexico Gang Task Force  
 New Mexico National Guard  
 Otero County Sheriff's Department  
 Questa Police Department  
 Rio Arriba County Sheriff's Department  
 Rio Rancho Police Department

Sandoval County Sheriff's Department  
 San Juan County Sheriff's Department  
 Santa Fe County Sheriff's Department  
 Santa Fe Police Department  
 Silver City Police Department  
 Taos Police Department  
 Tatum Police Department  
 Torrance County Sheriff's Department  
 University of New Mexico Police Department  
 Valencia County Sheriff's Department

### Federal

Executive Office of the President  
   Office of National Drug Control Policy  
     New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area  
     New Mexico Investigative Support Center  
 Federal Trade Commission  
 U.S. Department of Defense  
   Joint Task Force North  
 U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
   U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
     U.S. Border Patrol  
   U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
 U.S. Department of Justice  
   Drug Enforcement Administration  
     El Paso Intelligence Center  
     National Seizure System  
   Federal Bureau of Investigation  
   U.S. Attorneys Office  
 U.S. Department of the Treasury  
   Internal Revenue Service

### Other

Amtrak Rail System  
 Amtrak Police Department

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**Questions and comments may be directed to  
Southwest Unit, Regional Threat Analysis Branch.**

**National Drug Intelligence Center**

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LEO <https://www.leo.gov/http://leowcs.leopriv.gov/lesig/ndic/index.htm>