



## **Hawaii**

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area

# **Drug Market Analysis 2009**



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





# Hawaii

## High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area

# Drug Market Analysis 2009

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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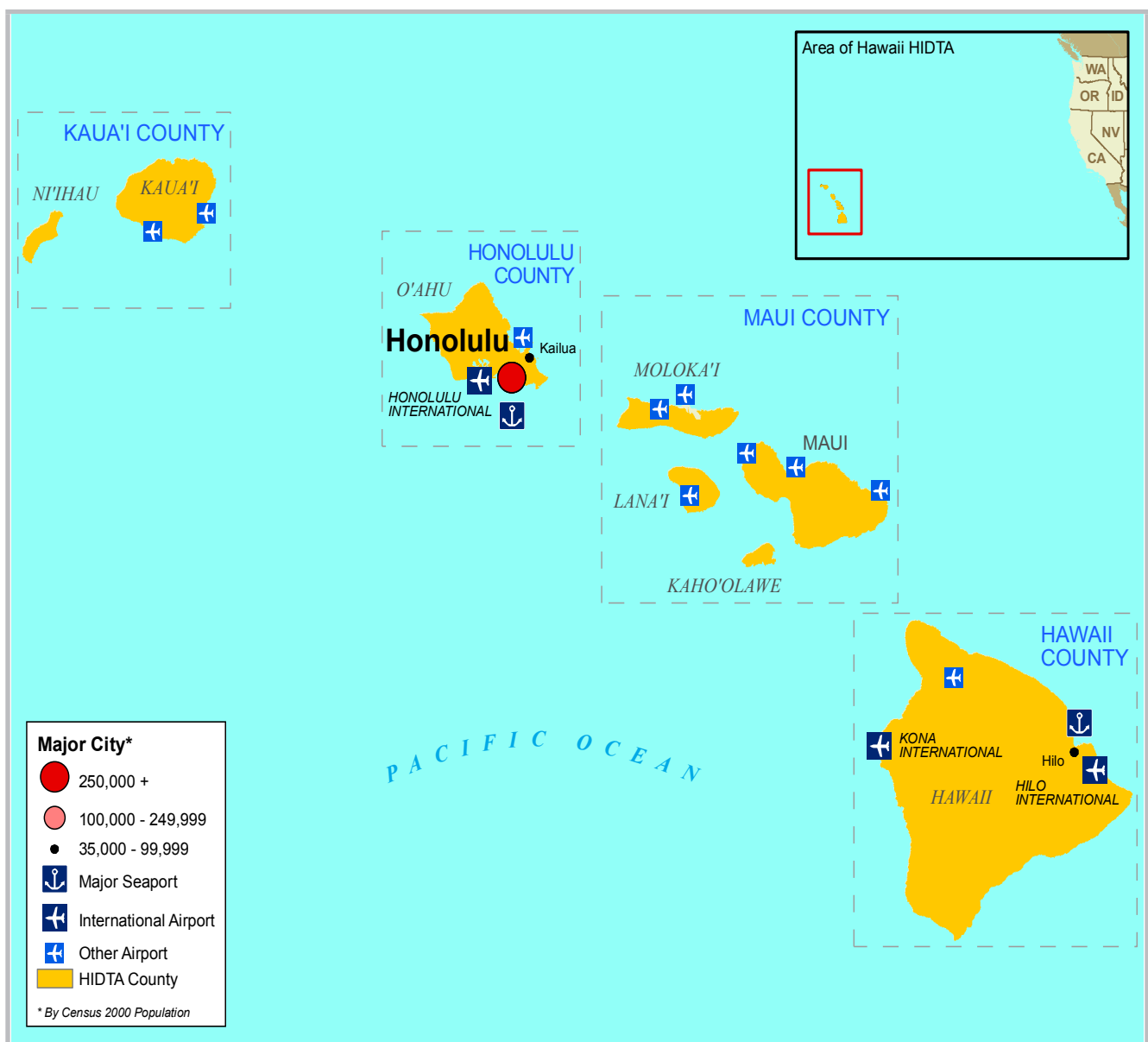
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# Preface

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

**Figure 1. Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.**



## Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- Ice methamphetamine trafficking and abuse are the most significant drug threats to the Hawaii HIDTA region. More drug-related crimes, including violent crimes and property crimes, are attributed to methamphetamine trafficking and abuse than to any other illicit drug.
- Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are the primary transporters and distributors of the drug.
- In 2008, members of the county council on the Big Island of Hawaii voted not to accept federal funding from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) for cannabis eradication operations, citing complaints from many residents who reportedly opposed the program. The Big Island is the primary cannabis cultivation region for illegal marijuana production within the state; the long-term impact of reduced funding for eradication operations is unknown at this time.
- Some illegal cannabis cultivators, particularly on the Big Island and Maui, also exploit Hawaii's state medical marijuana laws to conceal their illicit production and distribution activities. The number of registered patients on the Big Island has increased significantly over the last several years; nearly two-thirds of Hawaii's registered patients reside on the Big Island, which has only 12 percent of the state's total population.

## HIDTA Overview

Hawaii's unique geography, isolated location, heavy reliance on importation of commodities, high volume of tourist and commercial traffic,

and diverse demographics provide excellent opportunities for illicit drug trafficking and pose considerable challenges to law enforcement. As such, the Hawaii HIDTA was established in 1999 to address the illicit drug trafficking threat confronting the state. Hawaii is located approximately 2,500 miles from the West Coast of the United States and comprises the eight main islands<sup>1</sup> and a 1,500-mile chain of islets that span more than 6,400 square miles in the north central Pacific Ocean. (See Figure 1 on page 1.) It is situated between the continental United States and Pacific countries of Oceania.<sup>2</sup> Regionally, Hawaii is a gateway to Pacific Rim<sup>3</sup> countries and Asia. International airports and maritime ports as well as a developed transportation infrastructure facilitate not only the efficient flow of legitimate commerce but also the transshipment and distribution of illicit drugs and drug proceeds into and through the state. The diverse, largely transient (tourist) population in the HIDTA region provides a large customer base and a heightened degree of anonymity for various drug traffickers and criminal groups operating in the state.

The state of Hawaii has a total population of more than 1.2 million; approximately 70 percent of the population resides in the city of Honolulu on the island of Oahu. Honolulu is Hawaii's principal port of entry (POE) for travelers, mail, and cargo; the movement of passengers and commodities is facilitated by an international airport, international postal facility, and two of the state's busiest commercial harbors. Consequently, Honolulu is the primary transshipment point for

1. The eight main islands are Hawaii (the Big Island), Kahoolawe, Kauai, Lanai, Maui, Molokai, Niihau, and Oahu.
2. Oceania, with an estimated population of 3.1 million, is a region consisting of Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, as well as the thousands of coral atolls and volcanic islands in the South Pacific Ocean.
3. The Pacific Rim is a political and economic term used to designate the countries at the edges of the Pacific Ocean and the various island nations within the region (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam).

drugs and drug proceeds to, through, and from the state. Much of what transpires in terms of drug trafficking and abuse in Honolulu drives the drug situation on each of the other populated islands of the state.

## Drug Threat Overview

Ice methamphetamine trafficking and abuse pose the most significant drug threats to the Hawaii HIDTA region. Hawaii has one of the largest ice methamphetamine user populations per capita in the nation, a factor that many law enforcement and health and human services personnel believe is the major cause of the state's rate of property crime and violent crime. High-potency marijuana production, distribution, and abuse are secondary drug threats to Hawaii. Marijuana is widely available; demand continues to increase, especially among younger users who, along with a large segment of the local population, view marijuana use as normal. Powder and crack cocaine trafficking and abuse are a lesser concern in the region. Although powder cocaine prices have trended upward since 2006, no decrease in the availability of the drug has been reported. The trafficking and abuse of other dangerous drugs (ODDs) and Mexican black tar heroin and brown powder heroin are limited and represent low threats to the HIDTA region. Diverted controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) are a growing threat, according to law enforcement officials in the HIDTA region.

Ice methamphetamine is the greatest threat to the region due to its prevalent availability and high rates of abuse. Each law enforcement agency in the Hawaii HIDTA region responding to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2008 identified methamphetamine as the greatest drug threat in its jurisdiction and further indicated that methamphetamine was the drug most often associated with property crime and violent crime.

Methamphetamine abuse is increasingly reported as a contributing factor in incidents of child and domestic abuse, hostage situations, and homicides throughout the state. Methamphetamine is identified more often than any other drug, including alcohol, as the primary substance of abuse for treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Hawaii.

Mexican DTOs and local criminal groups regularly transport wholesale quantities of high-purity Mexican ice methamphetamine from the West Coast and from traditional production areas in California for distribution and consumption in Hawaii. In 2008, HIDTA law enforcement officers seized nearly 90 pounds of ice methamphetamine with an estimated wholesale market value of more than \$6.9 million.

Marijuana distribution and abuse are widespread in the Hawaii HIDTA region. This situation results from rising demand, increased availability of high-potency marijuana, and exploitation of Hawaii's state medical marijuana

### Methamphetamine Threat from Oceania and the Pacific Rim

Increasing ice methamphetamine production in Oceania and Pacific Rim countries poses a growing threat to Hawaii. The island nations of Oceania, well-known for lax criminal penalties for illicit drug production and money laundering, are struggling with criminal groups that are seeking safe havens to operate in. Hawaii HIDTA law enforcement and intelligence reporting indicates that organized criminal groups are financing large-scale clandestine ice methamphetamine production laboratories in Oceania and Pacific Rim countries and that an increasing amount of that ice methamphetamine is transported to Hawaii.

Source: Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.



laws by local cannabis cultivators and drug traffickers. Hawaii is one of the principal cannabis cultivation and marijuana production areas in the nation.<sup>4</sup> The island's tropical climate is conducive to year-round outdoor growing. Drug traffickers are also increasingly involved in indoor cultivation to produce higher-potency cannabis plants. Most of the marijuana available in Hawaii is produced there for local consumption; however, HIDTA officials report that Mexican and Asian DTOs and local criminal groups also transport high-potency marijuana produced in California, Oregon, Washington, and Canada to the state to meet growing demand.

Other illicit drugs and diverted CPDs are available and abused in the HIDTA region, but to a lesser extent than methamphetamine and marijuana. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups supply powder cocaine to the area, where it is then converted to crack cocaine by local retail distributors. Although wholesale prices for powder cocaine in Hawaii have been trending upward since 2006, law enforcement officials report that availability remained stable in 2008 and was still

### Operation Weed Killer

In November 2008 Maui law enforcement officials arrested seven men for violating state medical marijuana laws through their association with a local medical marijuana dispensary. Officers seized 335 cannabis plants, 2,300 grams of processed marijuana, 4,830 grams of unprocessed marijuana, 32 grams of hashish, 100 marijuana-laced candies, associated drug paraphernalia, one vehicle, and \$14,085 in cash.

Source: Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

comparable with 2006 levels. Mexican black tar heroin and brown powder heroin are distributed by Mexican DTOs and criminal groups, while MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy) is supplied primarily by Asian DTOs and criminal groups. These same trafficking groups may also have been attempting to introduce other stimulants and hallucinogens to the region. For example, in October 2008 the Honolulu Airport Interdiction Task Force seized a parcel package of more than 900 tablets that contained a combination of BZP (N-benzylpiperazine) and TFMPP (1-(3-trifluoromethylphenyl) piperazine).<sup>5</sup> Distributors and abusers commonly divert CPDs such as benzodiazepines, hydrocodone, and oxycodone through doctor-shopping, drug thefts, prescription forgeries, and Internet purchases. The ease with which drug traffickers and abusers obtain CPDs through the Internet is a significant concern for law enforcement officials and public health treatment providers in the HIDTA region.

## Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican DTOs are the principal illicit drug transporters and wholesale distributors in the Hawaii HIDTA region. Their expansive drug distribution networks enable them to consistently supply Hawaii with wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine, powder cocaine, black tar heroin, and brown powder heroin. Mexican DTOs typically focus their efforts on wholesale-level sales, supplying smaller Mexican and Asia-Pacific mixed-race DTOs that distribute drugs at the midlevel and retail level throughout the state. Mexican DTO members who are based in Hawaii typically operate in areas

4. In 2005, the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Drug Enforcement Administration, along with other federal, state, and local law enforcement and intelligence agencies, identified California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia as the primary marijuana cultivation areas in the United States. They are commonly referred to as the M7 states.

5. BZP is a common name for the synthetic stimulant N-benzylpiperazine. BZP tablets, especially those that also contain the hallucinogen TFMPP (1-(3-trifluoromethylphenyl) piperazine), are often sold as MDMA or promoted as an alternative to MDMA.

with higher concentrations of Hispanic residents, particularly Honolulu and Maui Counties, to more easily assimilate into the local community and avoid law enforcement detection.

Asian DTOs (typically ethnic Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Thai, or Vietnamese) operate throughout the HIDTA region. No particular ethnic group is dominant over the others. The drug trafficking threat that they pose to the area is secondary when compared with the threat posed by Mexican DTOs because of their lack of well-established distribution networks. Asian DTOs typically restrict involvement in their drug trafficking operations to individuals of similar race/ethnicity and familial affiliation. Asian DTOs transport wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine from sources in California and Asia, MDMA from sources in Canada and Asia, and high-potency marijuana from sources in Canada and the West Coast.

### 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.

Local distributors, including street gangs, prison gangs, and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs), are the primary retail distributors of illicit drugs in the Hawaii HIDTA region. Some members of these groups also produce marijuana grown locally in Hawaii. These groups typically comprise native Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Hispanic, and Caucasian individuals who were born and raised in Hawaii and share either familial or close social ties. The diversity of these groups facilitates close working relationships with other DTOs (Asian, Mexican, and Polynesian) that supply them with drugs, presenting serious challenges for law enforcement investigations.

## Production

Illicit drug production in the Hawaii HIDTA region principally involves extensive cannabis cultivation, some crack cocaine conversion, and very limited methamphetamine production.

The Hawaii HIDTA region is one of the most significant cannabis cultivation and marijuana production areas in the nation. According to DCE/SP data, Hawaii consistently ranks among the top states for the total number of cannabis plants eradicated each year. In 2008, more than 102,000 cannabis plants were eradicated from both outdoor and indoor grow sites. DCE/SP data also indicate that 26 percent fewer cannabis plants were eradicated in Hawaii in 2008 (102,771) than in 2007 (139,089). This situation is very likely the result of fewer eradication operations rather than a reduction in cannabis cultivation. Eradication operations on the Big Island of Hawaii (where most of the state's cannabis cultivation takes place) were curtailed beginning in May 2008 when the County Council voted not to accept DCE/SP funding for aerial surveillance and eradication efforts, citing complaints from many residents who reportedly opposed the program because low-flying helicopter missions

violated their privacy and disrupted rural life. Consequently, law enforcement agencies have been constrained in their efforts to effectively monitor cannabis grow activity.

Cannabis has been cultivated outdoors in Hawaii for decades because the tropical climate is conducive to year-round cultivation. Law enforcement reporting indicates that most outdoor cannabis cultivation takes place on the islands of Hawaii, Maui, Kauai, and Oahu, particularly on lands of the State Department of Land and Natural Resources Land Division in Hawaii and Maui Counties. Controlling cultivation in these areas is particularly challenging for law enforcement because of the vast tracts of unincorporated land available for hiding cannabis plants among native vegetation. Outdoor cultivation operations are conducted primarily by local Asian and Polynesian criminal groups and some Caucasian groups, including those that have relocated to Hawaii from the U.S. mainland.

Indoor cannabis cultivation in Hawaii is increasing because of the higher profits generated by year-round operations and controlled conditions that enable growers to produce high-potency marijuana that commands premium prices in most drug markets. Indoor cannabis cultivators typically use advanced growing techniques that include lighting, irrigation systems, chemical fertilizers, and plant cloning<sup>6</sup>. Indoor grow sites typically average fewer plants than outdoor grows and range in size from a single closet to entire houses or larger buildings that are converted into sophisticated grow operations. Some indoor grow sites have been relocated to residences or outbuildings on land formerly used for outdoor cannabis cultivation. Some indoor cultivators bypass electric

meters to eliminate high energy-use readings, large electric bills, and possible law enforcement scrutiny. Caucasian criminal groups and local independent dealers are the primary producers of high-potency marijuana from indoor cannabis cultivation sites in the HIDTA region.

Indoor grow sites also pose considerable safety and health concerns for law enforcement officers, first responders, and the general public. Buildings used for indoor grow sites are fire hazards due to the presence of the chemical fertilizers, high-intensity lighting, electrical equipment, and reconfigured electrical systems. High levels of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide may also be present at indoor grow sites as a result of damaged exhaust systems. Moreover, the prolonged high humidity at indoor grow sites often results in the growth of toxic green and black molds. As a result of the inherent dangers from exposure to these hazardous conditions, some law enforcement officers are now using basic air monitoring equipment, respirators, coveralls, gloves and disposable boot covers when entering these sites.

According to law enforcement officials, some cannabis cultivators exploit Hawaii's state medical marijuana laws to conduct illegal grow operations, primarily on the Big Island.<sup>7</sup> In 2008, 4,560 people were registered for medical marijuana certificates—a 41 percent increase from the 3,240 people registered in 2007 and a 104 percent increase from the

6. Plant cloning enables cannabis cultivators to select higher-quality plants and avoid male/female pollination, thereby raising potential THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) content. THC is the psychoactive chemical in marijuana. Cloning a cannabis plant is accomplished by simply taking a cutting of a select plant, allowing the cutting to sprout roots, and then planting it as a seedling. The resulting plant has the same genetic makeup as the parent plant.

7. In June 2000, Hawaii became the sixth state to legalize the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes. Hawaii's medical marijuana law (Act 228/Senate Bill 862 SD 2 HD) allows registered patients to have 1 ounce of usable marijuana per each mature plant. The possession limit is defined as 3 usable ounces consisting of 7 plants—3 mature and 4 immature. The law removes state criminal penalties for the use and possession of marijuana and the cultivation of cannabis by qualifying patients. Patients qualify through diagnosis and physician certification of certain medical conditions. The state of Hawaii's Department of Public Safety issues identification cards and maintains a registry of qualifying patients, caregivers, and physicians. In June 2008, the Governor of Hawaii signed Act 186 into law that further defined the term "physician-patient relationship" and penalties for noncompliance to this section. The impact of this legislation on illicit cannabis cultivation and marijuana abuse has not yet been determined.

2,241 registered in 2006. While 64 percent of the state's registered patients are located on the Big Island, notably only 12 percent of the state's population resides there. Most of the state's cannabis is illegally cultivated on the Big Island.

Local retail-level traffickers typically convert powder cocaine to crack cocaine on a limited basis in the Hawaii HIDTA region. Crack conversion by these local distributors typically takes place at or near distribution sites on an as-needed basis, usually in ounce quantities.

Local methamphetamine production in Hawaii is very limited and currently does not pose a threat to the HIDTA region. This situation is largely a result of successful law enforcement operations and the state of Hawaii's regulatory efforts and point-of-sale restrictions to control precursor chemicals. According to the National Seizure System (NSS), no methamphetamine production laboratories or ice conversion laboratories<sup>8</sup> were seized in the HIDTA region from January 2007 through November 2008. Only 4 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in 2006, 9 in 2005, and 10 in 2004. One ice conversion laboratory was seized in 2006, and 6 were seized in both 2005 and 2004.

## Transportation

Drug traffickers exploit Hawaii's heavy reliance on the importation of consumer goods by air and maritime conveyances to transport illicit drugs to the state. Illicit drugs are transported primarily into the Honolulu International Airport on Oahu through the international postal facility or by couriers aboard commercial flights. While most of the illicit drugs transported to Oahu are abused there, some drugs are transported on interisland flights to neighboring islands for

subsequent distribution. Additionally, six of the eight islands have direct flight service to and from major cities on the U.S. mainland, Asia, and Canada; these services facilitate the transportation of illicit drugs from these locations. Hawaii's system of commercial harbors consists of 10 harbors on six islands through which most imported goods enter the state; however, limited information and resources make detection and interdiction efforts at these facilities extremely challenging for U.S. Customs and Border Protection and other law enforcement officials.

Mexican DTOs are the primary transporters of most illicit drugs available in the state from the west coast of the U.S. mainland. Mexican DTOs use their well-developed networks to transport wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin across the U.S.–Mexico border to drug markets, primarily in California and Nevada, where the drugs are divided into smaller quantities and subsequently shipped to Hawaii. Mexican DTOs also transport ice methamphetamine produced in California into Hawaii. Asian DTOs are increasingly transporting illicit drugs into Hawaii—particularly high-potency marijuana from Canada, northern California, Oregon, and Washington, and ice methamphetamine and heroin from Asia. Asian traffickers also use Hawaii as a transshipment point for ice methamphetamine transported from the West Coast to the Pacific Basin, primarily Guam.

## Distribution

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups dominate wholesale drug distribution in the Hawaii HIDTA region, supplying primarily other Mexican, Polynesian, and local criminal groups. These groups in turn supply midlevel quantities to retail distributors, primarily street gangs and independent dealers.

Retail drug sales in metropolitan areas take place in open-air markets (located on streets and in parking lots) and in clubs and bars, particularly

8. Methamphetamine conversion laboratories are sometimes used by local distributors to convert powder methamphetamine to ice methamphetamine or to "clean up" ice methamphetamine that is of poor quality.

## Fifty Pounds of Ice Methamphetamine Seized at the Honolulu International Airport

In February 2008, a Federal Express employee in Los Angeles, California, shipped two boxes containing a total of 50 pounds of ice methamphetamine to Honolulu. The employee planned to fly to Honolulu, retrieve the packages, and deliver them to his contacts on the island. The drugs were concealed in 50 1-pound plastic containers, wrapped in plastic to avoid detection, and equally divided between the two boxes. As an employee of the company, he did not anticipate a search of his shipment; however, Federal Express Security in Los Angeles discovered the drugs in the boxes and contacted the DEA.

DEA officials with the Honolulu Airport Interdiction Task Force followed the packages through a controlled delivery and allowed the Federal Express employee to take possession of the boxes. The employee delivered them to a coconspirator at a local shopping center, and that individual took the boxes to a local residence, where a third male coconspirator opened the packages the next day. All three men were subsequently arrested. According to the U.S. Attorneys Office, District of Hawaii, this was the largest package seizure of methamphetamine in Hawaii in more than 20 years. The drugs had an estimated street value of \$1.5 million.

Photo of one of the boxes containing ice methamphetamine.



Drug Enforcement Administration

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration, Hawaii Airport Task Force.

in the Chinatown area of Oahu. Retail drug sales in rural areas usually take place at prearranged locations and typically are between dealers and known or referred customers. Law enforcement reporting indicates that distributors use cell phones, satellite phones, pagers, and other personal communication devices to communicate with suppliers and customers. In addition, distributors often use text messages consisting of code words that allow them to communicate with reduced risk of detection. Cell phones are used for a limited time (often no more than 30 days) before switching to a new phone and number to further reduce the possibility of having calls monitored.

## Drug-Related Crime

Most crimes perpetrated in Hawaii are drug-related, particularly those involving methamphetamine. According to the Western States Information Network (WSIN), there were 2,042 drug-related critical events in 2008, of which 887 were methamphetamine related. All Hawaii state and local law enforcement agencies responding to the NDTs 2008 indicated that methamphetamine was the drug that most contributed to violent crime and property crime in their jurisdictions. Additionally, data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,

## Operation Vegas Pipeline

In September 2008, a federal grand jury returned additional verdicts against two of the organizational leaders targeted in Operation Vegas Pipeline. Operation Vegas Pipeline was an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation conducted by DEA, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, and the Honolulu Police Department. Investigative efforts focused on the illicit activities of a Mexican DTO operating between Las Vegas, Nevada, and Honolulu. This organization was responsible for shipping approximately 2,000 pounds of ice methamphetamine through the use of package delivery services from Las Vegas to Hawaii for subsequent distribution throughout the state. Proceeds from drug sales were mailed back to organization members in Las Vegas.

A total of 21 individuals were prosecuted and convicted of federal drug offenses for their roles in the drug conspiracy. Five real properties in Las Vegas, the contents of five bank accounts and a safety deposit box also held in Las Vegas, along with \$8 million, were forfeited to the federal government. They were forfeited because they had been obtained with, or contained, cash proceeds from the drug trafficking conspiracy and were involved in, or traceable to, money laundering offenses.

Source: U.S. Attorneys Office District of Hawaii press release dated September 4, 2008.

Firearms and Explosives show that 21 of the 44 cases investigated in Hawaii in 2008 were drug related; of those, 15 were methamphetamine related.

Drug abusers in Hawaii are increasingly committing property crimes, including burglaries, vehicle break-ins, and identity theft, to acquire money to purchase methamphetamine and other illicit drugs. According to the U.S. Secret Service in Honolulu, these individuals, sometimes working cooperatively in organized groups, are targeting not only homes but also automobiles parked in public areas such as beaches, parks, or scenic lookouts to steal cash, valuables, and personal identification information. Tourists are especially at risk in these locations.

Home invasion robberies of illegal indoor cannabis grow sites are a concern for law enforcement agencies in the HIDTA region. HIDTA officials report that many of these robberies go unreported because the victims do not want to alert law enforcement to their own illicit activities. HIDTA law enforcement officials also report that indoor cultivators increasingly possess

weapons to protect their operations from home invasion robbers.

## Abuse

Illicit drug abuse levels in the Hawaii HIDTA region are high, particularly for ice methamphetamine. Data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) reveal that methamphetamines/amphetamines were identified more often than any other drug, including alcohol, as the primary substance of abuse for treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Hawaii from 2003 through 2007 (the latest year for which data are available). The number of treatment admissions for marijuana abuse is also high and increasing, but is not considered to be as significant as the number for methamphetamine abuse, the effects of which are much more difficult to treat. Cocaine, heroin, and ODDs are also abused throughout Hawaii, but to a lesser extent. The abuse of controlled prescription narcotics such

**Table 1. Number of Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities in Hawaii, 2003–2007**

Drug Type	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Methamphetamine/amphetamines	2,570	2,381	2,624	2,181	2,184
Marijuana/hashish	1,391	1,215	1,577	1,618	1,783
Cocaine	317	279	222	302	245
Heroin	181	156	162	160	148
Other opioids	181	112	155	134	173

Source: Treatment Episode Data Set.

as oxycodone, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, and methadone takes place at lower levels than the abuse of other drugs; however, controlled prescription narcotic abuse is increasing and is a growing concern in Hawaii. (See Table 1.)

## Illicit Finance

Various money laundering techniques are commonly used by traffickers in the Hawaii HIDTA region to mask the origins of their drug proceeds. Drug traffickers primarily use package delivery services, but also employ couriers aboard commercial flights, to transport drug proceeds in bulk from Hawaii to drug source areas. Traffickers also launder drug proceeds through the use of wire remittance services, money services businesses, and structured bank transactions. Moreover, a number of traffickers, particularly retail-level traffickers, launder drug proceeds through the purchase of expensive consumer items such as automobiles, clothing, and jewelry. Mexican and Asian DTOs are the most prominent drug money launderers in the region.

Mexican DTOs send drug proceeds primarily by package delivery services, U.S. mail, air couriers, or maritime freight from locations throughout Hawaii either directly to Mexico or through major collection sites on the U.S. mainland—Arizona, California, Nevada, and Texas—en route to Mexico. Asian DTOs frequently use drug proceeds to purchase commercial and

residential property, both in their home countries and throughout the state.

## Outlook

The threat posed by the trafficking and abuse of ice methamphetamine will not diminish in the near term and will remain the most significant drug threat to the Hawaii HIDTA region. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups have established their presence in the area and will further capitalize on the primary drug markets within the HIDTA region. Hawaii has strategic drug trafficking and marketing significance for Mexican DTOs because it provides a gateway to other markets in the Pacific Basin. Local methamphetamine production is uncommon and does not constitute a significant threat to the region at this time, largely as a result of successful regulatory efforts to control the sale of precursor chemicals and the ability of Mexican traffickers to meet local demand for the drug.

The Hawaii HIDTA will remain one of the most significant cannabis cultivation and marijuana production areas in the nation. The demand for high-potency marijuana in the region is increasing, and there are no indications that this will change over the next year. To meet rising demand, independent suppliers and criminal groups will establish larger, more sophisticated, indoor cannabis cultivation operations in the region to capitalize on greater profit margins

associated with higher-potency marijuana. Additionally, criminal groups and local independent dealers will continue to support market demands by importing high-potency marijuana from Canada and the West Coast of the United States. Illegal cannabis cultivators will increasingly exploit state medicinal marijuana laws and expand their large-scale cultivation operations.



## Sources

### Local, State, and Regional

Hawaii County Police Department  
 Hawaii Police Department  
 Honolulu Police Department  
 Kauai Hawaii Interagency Mobile Police Apprehension Task Force  
   Kona Vice Section  
 Kauai Police Department  
 Maui Hawaii Interagency Mobile Police Apprehension Task Force  
 Maui Police Department  
 Oahu Hawaii Interagency Mobile Police Apprehension Task Force  
 State of Hawaii  
   Attorney General's Office  
   Center for Substance Abuse Treatment  
   Department of Public Safety  
     Narcotics Enforcement Division  
   Department of Transportation  
   Honolulu Prosecutor's Office

### Federal

Executive Office of the President  
   Office of National Drug Control Policy  
     Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture  
   Forest Service  
 U.S. Department of Commerce  
   U.S. Census Bureau  
 U.S. Department of Defense  
   Joint Interagency Task Force West  
 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
     Office of Applied Studies  
       Treatment Episode Data Set  
 U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
   U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
   U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
 U.S. Department of Justice  
   Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives  
   Bureau of Justice Assistance  
     Western States Information Network  
   Drug Enforcement Administration  
     Diversion Program  
     Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program

El Paso Intelligence Center  
   National Seizure System  
 Los Angeles Field Division  
   Honolulu District Office  
     Honolulu Airport Task Force  
 U.S. Marshals Service  
   Hawaii Office  
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   United States Secret Service  
     Honolulu Field Office

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