



**Drug Market Analysis**

**2008**

**North Florida**

**High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area**



**NATIONAL DRUG INTELLIGENCE CENTER**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**







# Drug Market Analysis **2008**

# North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



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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.



# National Drug Intelligence Center

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# PREFACE

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

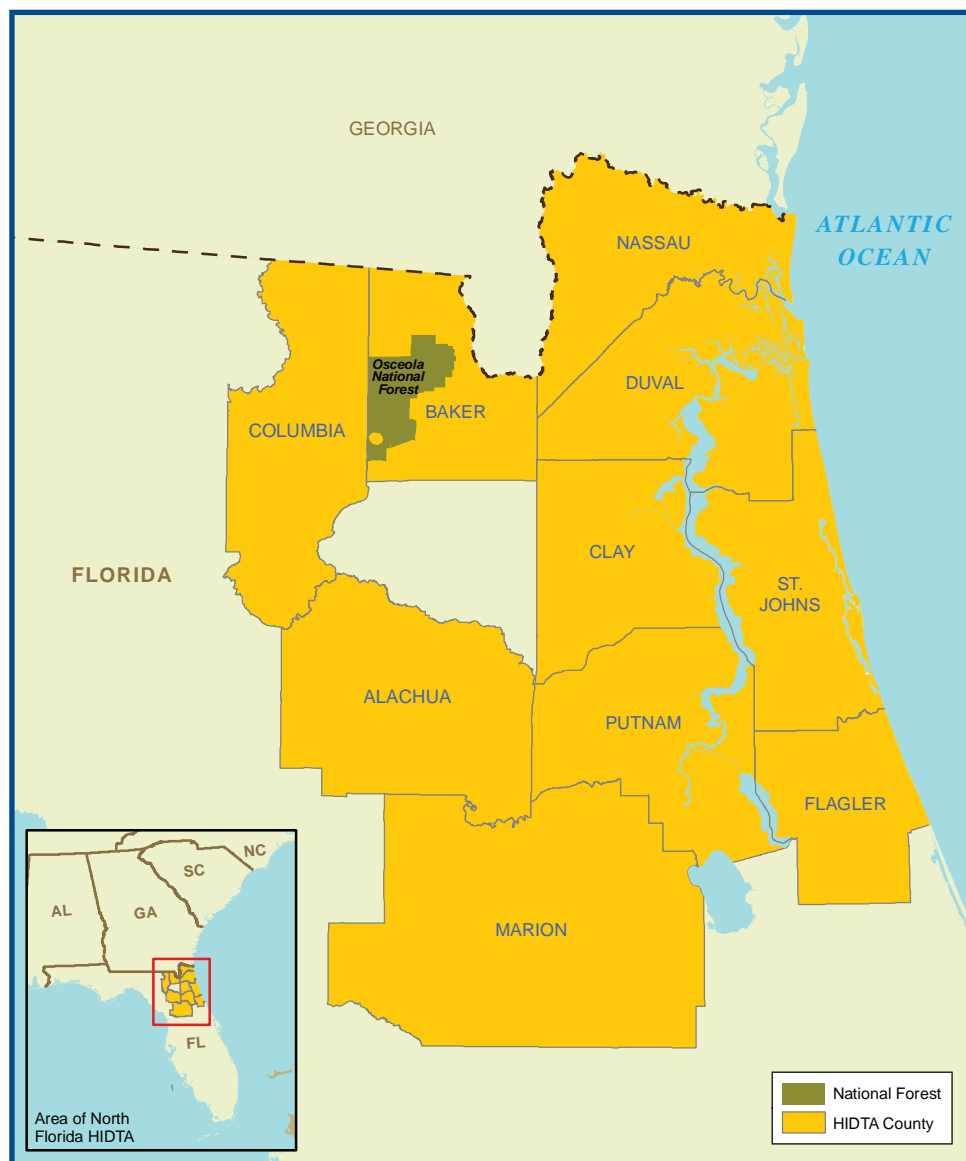


Figure 1. North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.



## STRATEGIC DRUG THREAT DEVELOPMENTS

- Jacksonville, the primary drug market in the North Florida HIDTA region, is also a significant transshipment area for wholesale quantities of illicit drugs transported north from Miami, Florida, to drug markets on the east coast and south from Atlanta, Georgia, to drug markets throughout Florida.<sup>1</sup>
- Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and associated Hispanic criminal groups are the dominant transporters and wholesale distributors of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and ice methamphetamine in the North Florida HIDTA region.
- Caucasian and Cuban DTOs<sup>2</sup> are satisfying the increasing demand for high-potency marijuana in the region by cultivating significant quantities of indoor cannabis; they are the primary indoor cannabis cultivators in the North Florida HIDTA region. The total number of indoor cannabis plants eradicated in the region increased 277 percent from 2005 through 2007.
- Nationally affiliated street gangs, including Black Disciples, Crips, and Latin Kings, are increasingly active in drug distribution in the North Florida HIDTA region; competition for drug distribution territories in the region has led to high levels of violence among nationally affiliated and local street gangs.

1. Atlanta, Georgia, is a national-level distribution center for powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, and Mexican marijuana and a significant source for cocaine and methamphetamine distributed in northern Florida.

2. Cuban drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are composed of individuals of Cuban descent and ethnic Cubans located in the United States.

## HIDTA OVERVIEW

The North Florida HIDTA region encompasses Alachua, Baker, Clay, Columbia, Duval, Flagler, Marion, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties. (See Figure 1 on page 1.) The North Florida HIDTA region, particularly Jacksonville, is a significant transshipment area for illegal drugs transported north from Miami, Florida, to east coast drug markets such as Boston, Massachusetts; New York, New York; and Savannah, Georgia, and for drugs transported south from Atlanta to drug markets throughout Florida.

Jacksonville, which has the largest population of any city in Florida,<sup>3</sup> is the primary drug market in the North Florida HIDTA region. As such, drug trafficking and drug abuse activities in the Jacksonville area have a considerable influence on drug markets in the entire region. Jacksonville is one of the principal ports of entry (POEs) for travelers, mail, and cargo into the continental United States; millions of tons of commercial truck and maritime freight and parcels as well as high volumes of commercial and passenger vehicles transit the HIDTA region daily. A large international airport, numerous international parcel transshipment hubs, and a large commercial seaport facilitate high levels of legitimate commerce and drug trafficking activity.

The North Florida HIDTA region has a highly developed transportation system, including major roadways such as Interstates 10, 75, and 95, which link it to drug distribution centers in Atlanta and Miami and to major eastern U.S. drug markets. (See Figure 2 on page 9.) DTOs exploit the region's geographic location to transport illicit drugs into the region and on to other drug markets in Florida and on the east coast.

3. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the estimated population of Jacksonville, Florida, was 799,875 in 2006 (the latest year for which such data are available); the city of Miami, Florida, had the second highest estimated population—358,091—in 2006. Census data further indicate that in 2006 the estimated population of Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida, was 837,964, while the estimated population of Miami-Dade County (Miami), Florida, was 2,402,208.



## DRUG THREAT OVERVIEW

Cocaine distribution and abuse pose the greatest threat to the North Florida HIDTA region as evidenced by the high levels of violence associated with cocaine (particularly crack) distribution and the high number of cocaine-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities. According to data from the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2007 (the latest year for which such data are available), 11 of the 12 local law enforcement agency respondents in the North Florida HIDTA region reported that cocaine was the greatest drug threat in their jurisdictions. Moreover, large quantities of cocaine are available in the area; reporting from North Florida HIDTA Initiatives<sup>4</sup> indicates that over 1,000 kilograms of powder cocaine and 6 kilograms of crack cocaine were seized in 2007. (See Table 1.)

The production and distribution of marijuana, particularly high-potency indoor-grown cannabis, pose a significant threat to the North Florida HIDTA region. Marijuana is widely available throughout the HIDTA region and is abused by members of all racial/ethnic and social groups. The demand for high-potency marijuana is increasing in the region, as is the number of indoor cannabis cultivation sites established to meet the rising demand. These indoor cultivation sites are established and operated primarily by Caucasian and Cuban DTOs.

The distribution and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs pose a serious threat to the region. Prescription narcotics are widely abused in the region, particularly among Caucasian adolescents and adult abusers; law enforcement and public

4. North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) funds are allocated to nine Initiatives (program areas): Alachua and Columbia Counties Initiative; Currency, Narcotics and Transportation Interdiction; Fugitive Apprehension Strike Team; Prescription Drug Squad; Maritime Investigation and Interdiction Initiative; North Florida HIDTA Task Force; Tri-County Task Force; Unified Drug Enforcement Strike Team; and Violent Crime and Narcotics Task Force.

health officials in the region report that the average age of pharmaceutical drug abusers is decreasing. The most widely available and commonly abused prescription narcotics are methadone, morphine, OxyContin (oxycodone), and Vicodin (hydrocodone). Central nervous system (CNS) depressants such as the benzodiazepines Valium (diazepam) and Xanax (alprazolam) also are available and abused. Steroids are sometimes transported, distributed, and abused in the region. Abusers of pharmaceutical drugs are enticed in part by the ease with which they can obtain the drugs over the Internet and from retail-level distributors. The North Florida HIDTA region also is a source area for pharmaceutical drugs available throughout the eastern United States; abusers travel to the region to purchase diverted pharmaceutical drugs from Caucasian distributors or use the Internet to order the drugs from Florida-based Internet pharmacies.<sup>5</sup>

Methamphetamine, other dangerous drugs (ODDs)—principally MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy)—and heroin pose comparatively low threats to the North Florida HIDTA region. Methamphetamine availability and abuse are at relatively low levels in the region, despite an increase in the number of

**Table 1. North Florida HIDTA Drug Seizures, in Kilograms, 2007\***

Drug	Amount Seized
Powder Cocaine	1,032.079
Crack Cocaine	6.101
Ice Methamphetamine	6.958
Powder Methamphetamine	13.274
Marijuana	2,839.610
Hydroponic Marijuana	71.810
Heroin	1.665
MDMA (in dosage units)	23,796.500

Source: North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.  
\*Seizures of hashish, various pharmaceutical drugs, and methamphetamine precursors are not included in this table.

5. The full extent of prescription drug sales from Florida-based Internet pharmacies is an intelligence gap.



methamphetamine laboratories seized from 2006 through 2007. The demand for high-purity ice methamphetamine, however, is rising. The availability and abuse of ODDs, principally MDMA, are limited in the North Florida HIDTA region. Heroin availability and abuse are stable at low levels.

## DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS

Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups are the principal transporters and wholesale distributors of cocaine, heroin, Mexican marijuana, and ice methamphetamine in the North Florida HIDTA region. They are increasing their influence and control over drug distribution in the North Florida HIDTA region and in the entire state of Florida as a result of their dominance over land-based drug smuggling routes from Mexico to the United States and from the Southwest Border to Atlanta and locations throughout Florida. Consequently, these organizations are able to efficiently transport and distribute large quantities of illicit drugs into and through the North Florida HIDTA region. The control exercised by these tightly coordinated and compartmentalized organizations and groups is

facilitated by the growing Hispanic population in northern Florida. Mexican traffickers easily assimilate into these Hispanic communities, where they can conceal their drug trafficking activities.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Mexican traffickers rely upon strong familial ties in Mexico and northern Florida to further facilitate their transportation and distribution of drugs in the region. Members of Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups are increasingly establishing residency in upscale suburban and rural communities, where they store and distribute illicit drugs and consolidate drug proceeds.

Colombian and Dominican DTOs are significant transporters and distributors of powder cocaine and limited quantities of South American (SA) heroin, pharmaceutical drugs, and MDMA; some of these DTOs transport cocaine directly from Miami into Jacksonville for further distribution in local retail drug markets. These traffickers typically transport cocaine using vehicles or package delivery services from southern Florida to and through northern Florida to various destinations in the Mid-Atlantic, New England, and New York/New Jersey HIDTA regions. These DTOs use similar methods to transport illicit drug proceeds and diverted pharmaceutical drugs and MDMA, usually obtained from sources in Canada, through northern Florida to southern Florida.

Cuban DTOs establish and operate numerous indoor high-potency cannabis grow sites in the North Florida HIDTA region and have expanded such operations throughout the southeastern United States. These organizations, frequently based in Miami, purchase real estate in northern Florida for the sole purpose of indoor cannabis cultivation. Cuban DTOs, which have rapidly expanded their operations throughout Florida, often use illegal immigrants from Cuba and other Caribbean Islands to work at the grow sites.

### 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.

6. According to U.S. Census Bureau data from 2000 (the latest year for which such data are available), Caucasians account for 75 percent of the North Florida HIDTA region's population, followed by African Americans (19%), Hispanics (4%), Asians (2%), and other races (less than 1%). Further, the Hispanic population grew over 103 percent, from 38,885 in 1990 to 78,901 in 2000.

Other DTOs and criminal groups of various races/ethnicities, including African American, Caucasian, and Jamaican, distribute drugs at the retail level and midlevel in the North Florida HIDTA region. Most of these traffickers obtain powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, and Mexican marijuana from Mexican DTOs. African American criminal groups typically distribute crack cocaine and marijuana at the retail level. Caucasian DTOs and criminal groups distribute marijuana, pharmaceutical drugs, and ODDs; they also cultivate cannabis. Jamaican DTOs distribute cocaine and marijuana; these traffickers have established ties with Mexican DTOs located in northern Florida and the Southwest Border area and obtain wholesale quantities of cocaine and Mexican marijuana from these DTOs for distribution in the North Florida HIDTA region. Jamaican DTOs also 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.

Asian DTOs distribute large quantities of MDMA and limited quantities of high-potency Canadian marijuana and pharmaceutical drugs on a sporadic basis in the North Florida HIDTA region. 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 locally based and nationally affiliated, dominate the retail-level distribution of drugs in many areas of the HIDTA region; 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 of the region. Most street gangs in the area 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 a result of the significant rivalries or disputes over drug territories among street gangs; however, some

gang violence is directed at members of the same gang over theft and jealousy. 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 decreased 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 increasing presence of nationally affiliated street gangs in the region. Moreover, some street gangs also trade illicit drugs for firearms; this trading increases the level of violence.

Local street gangs such as 103rd Street Gang, 45th Street Boys, and Eastside Boys distribute illicit drugs in the North Florida HIDTA region; these gangs are the principal retail distributors of powder and crack cocaine, marijuana, and other drugs in the region. Most street gangs are composed of members with similar racial/ethnic backgrounds, and most are established and based upon street or neighborhood affiliations, especially in northwestern Jacksonville. Some gangs, however, have memberships that consist of African American and Hispanic individuals. Local street gangs commonly adopt multiple facets of the gang culture from national-level street gangs, often from information on the Internet, but typically do not have ties to those national-level gangs. Many local street gangs are formed for a collective pursuit of money derived from illicit drug distribution.

Nationally affiliated street gangs such as Black Disciples, Bloods, Crips, and Latin Kings are increasingly distributing drugs, particularly crack cocaine and marijuana, at the retail level in the region. The Flagler County Sheriff's Office reports that in addition to distributing illicit drugs, these nationally affiliated street gangs are attempting to incorporate the local street gangs to increase their membership and decrease or eliminate competition within local drug markets. Moreover, law enforcement officials in Gainesville and Jacksonville report a limited but growing presence of Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13) street gang members in their jurisdictions.



Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) such as Pagan's, Outlaws, and various support clubs distribute illicit drugs in some areas of the North Florida HIDTA region. OMGs typically distribute cocaine, powder methamphetamine, and high-potency Canadian marijuana. OMGs transport these drugs into the region from sources throughout the United States as well as from Canada, the Caribbean, and Mexico.

## PRODUCTION

Illicit drug production in the North Florida HIDTA region primarily involves the conversion of powder cocaine to crack, indoor cannabis cultivation, and small-scale powder methamphetamine production. Crack conversion, which principally takes place in urban areas of the region, particularly northwestern Jacksonville, is a significant concern to law enforcement officials because it is associated with high levels of abuse, property crime, and related violence. Retail-level crack cocaine distributors, generally members of African American criminal groups and street gangs, convert powder cocaine to crack in small quantities near intended markets because federal sentences for distribution or possession of crack are more severe than those for powder cocaine.

Most of the marijuana available in the North Florida HIDTA region is produced locally at indoor and, to a lesser extent, outdoor cannabis grow sites; some marijuana available in the region is produced in Canada, Jamaica, and Mexico. Indoor cannabis cultivation is prevalent throughout Florida and the North Florida HIDTA region.<sup>7</sup> According to Florida's Domestic Marijuana Eradication Indoor

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7. According to Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) data, approximately 74,698 cannabis plants were eradicated from 944 indoor grow sites, compared with 9,116 plants eradicated from 263 outdoor sites in Florida in 2007. DCE/SP eradication data are available only at the state level; thus, the number of cannabis plants and grow sites eradicated and seized reflects the entire state of Florida, not only the North Florida HIDTA region. Moreover, DCE/SP changed the methodology for collecting data in 2007 by adding eradication totals from public land agencies. Therefore, 2007 data from outdoor operations cannot be compared with previous years' data.

Grow Program data, the total number of indoor cannabis plants eradicated in the North Florida HIDTA region increased 277 percent from 2005 through 2007.<sup>8</sup> (See Table 2 on page 7.) The Florida Department of Law Enforcement reports that marijuana producers continue to move cannabis cultivation operations indoors to avoid law enforcement detection and to increase the quality of the marijuana produced. The controlled environment, combined with sophisticated growing techniques such as hydroponics, typically yields high-potency marijuana, which commands higher prices.<sup>9</sup> For example, in Jacksonville the wholesale price for commercial-grade marijuana was approximately \$650 per pound in 2007, while the wholesale price for hydroponic marijuana ranged from \$2,500 to \$4,000 per pound; the retail price for commercial-grade marijuana was \$120 per ounce, while the retail price for hydroponic marijuana was \$375 per ounce. 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. As a result, Florida House Bill 0173 was presented for signature to the governor on June 11, 2008, addressing the increasing use of residences for high-potency cannabis cultivation.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the indoor cannabis grow sites in the North Florida HIDTA region are established and operated by Cuban DTOs and criminal groups;

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8. North Florida HIDTA officials report that fluctuations in the number of cannabis plants eradicated each year are frequently the result of available eradication assets and do not necessarily indicate a change in the amount of cannabis cultivated in the region.

9. According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) quantifications of marijuana samples submitted to the University of Mississippi Potency Monitoring Project by federal, state, and local law enforcement officials in 2006 (the latest year for which such data are available) indicate that marijuana produced in Florida had an average THC content of 7.73 percent.

10. 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; and provides that possession of 25 or more cannabis plants is prima facie evidence of intent to sell or distribute.



**Table 2. Indoor Cannabis Cultivation Sites Seized and Plants Eradicated in North Florida HIDTA Counties, 2005–2007**

County	2005		2006		2007	
	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated
Alachua	1	197	8	491	14	1,478
Baker	0	0	1	5	1	1
Clay	1	542	2	95	11	973
Columbia*	3	209	0	0	1	15
Duval	20	556	26	1,692	71	4,282
Flagler	3	146	1	4	5	642
Marion	3	1,293	4	16	21	3,394
Nassau	0	0	2	104	8	117
Putnam	0	0	3	321	2	17
St. Johns*	0	0	0	0	3	182
<b>Total HIDTA Region</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>2,943</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>2,728</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>11,101</b>

Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

\*Columbia and St. Johns Counties did not participate in Florida's Domestic Marijuana Eradication Indoor Grow Program in 2006.

some Caucasian DTOs and criminal groups cultivate cannabis indoors in the region. For several years Cuban growers cultivated high-potency cannabis at indoor grow sites in southern Florida. Cuban growers have expanded their indoor cannabis grow operations to other parts of Florida as well as other areas of the southeast, such as Georgia and North Carolina. Law enforcement reporting and seizure data indicate that Cuban DTOs are principal producers of indoor cannabis 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 relatively small profit to a coordinated effort by these groups to operate large-scale indoor cannabis grow sites. In fact, law enforcement reporting indicates that many of the Cuban DTO-operated indoor cannabis cultivation sites in Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina may be linked to a single southern Florida-based Cuban DTO. Many of the indoor grow sites in the North Florida HIDTA

### Operation D-Day

On April 30, 2008, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, with the support of numerous law enforcement agencies including the North Florida HIDTA, conducted coordinated raids of high-potency cannabis grow houses in 48 Florida counties. Operation D-Day resulted in 135 arrests and the identification of 150 residences used to produce high-potency marijuana. During this operation, participating officials seized high-potency cannabis plants worth an estimated \$41 million. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office alone seized 632 cannabis plants, seven firearms, and a bulletproof vest and arrested 14 individuals in Duval County. Additional arrests are expected in this statewide operation.

Source: North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.



**Table 3. Methamphetamine Laboratories Seized in the North Florida HIDTA Region, 2003–2008\***

County	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008*
Alachua	1	1	0	0	0	0
Baker	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clay	0	0	0	2	2	0
Columbia	2	0	0	0	0	0
Duval	1	0	3	5	0	0
Flagler	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marion	12	4	10	4	8	3
Nassau	0	0	0	0	1	0
Putnam	0	1	1	2	10	0
St. Johns	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Total in HIDTA region</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>3</b>

Source: National Seizure System, data run on May 14, 2008.

\*Partial year data as of May 14, 2008.

region are located in residences in suburban and rural communities surrounding Jacksonville. The depressed housing market in Jacksonville has resulted in increased home foreclosures, a circumstance that provides opportunities for Cuban DTOs to acquire bargain-priced properties for use in further expansion of indoor cannabis grow sites in the region. Moreover, Cuban DTOs and criminal groups often require illegal immigrants of various races/ethnicities to live in the residential grow sites to cultivate the cannabis plants and to provide the appearance of typical residential activity in the home. The illegal immigrants are frequently required to reside at these operations as reimbursement for their illegal passage into the United States provided by Cuban DTOs or their associates.

Small-scale powder methamphetamine production takes place in the North Florida HIDTA region. According to National Seizure System (NSS) data, the number of methamphetamine laboratories seized in North Florida HIDTA counties fluctuated but increased overall from 2003 through 2007. Most of the methamphetamine laboratories seized in the region during this period were discovered in Marion County, and an unusually high number of methamphetamine laboratories (10) were seized in Putnam County in

2007. (See Table 3.) Moreover, most of the methamphetamine laboratories seized used the anhydrous ammonia method (commonly referred to as the Birch or Nazi method). Less than 2 ounces of methamphetamine could be produced in these laboratories per production cycle.

## TRANSPORTATION

Traffickers use various methods and means of conveyance to transport illicit drugs into, through, and from the North Florida HIDTA region. Large quantities of illicit drugs are frequently transported to the North Florida HIDTA region for local distribution; some of these illicit drugs are further transported to other drug markets in central and southern Florida as well as to drug markets on the east coast.

The North Florida HIDTA region's highly developed transportation infrastructure is routinely exploited by drug traffickers to transport wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin, Mexican marijuana, and ice methamphetamine into the region from Atlanta and locations along the Southwest Border using private and commercial vehicles on Interstates 10, 75, and 95. These DTOs also transport drug proceeds back to the Southwest Border using the same



Figure 2. North Florida HIDTA transportation infrastructure.

means. Traffickers often 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. Moreover, some traffickers are attempting to avoid law enforcement interdiction efforts along major interstates in the region by using more indirect routes, such as state roads, to transport drugs into and through the HIDTA region.

Mexican, Asian, Colombian, Cuban, Dominican, Hispanic, and Jamaican DTOs and criminal groups and African American and Caucasian criminal groups also transport wholesale quantities of illicit drugs into the North Florida HIDTA region. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin, Mexican marijuana, and ice methamphetamine from the Southwest Border and Atlanta into northern Florida. Asian DTOs operating in the region typically use private vehicles and commercial air



flights to transport drugs, principally Canadian marijuana and MDMA, from Canada or states near the U.S.–Canada border to northern Florida for distribution. Colombian and Dominican DTOs and criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine and smaller quantities of SA heroin into and through the region from southern Florida and the Caribbean; they also transport pharmaceutical drugs and MDMA from sources in Canada through northern Florida to southern Florida. Cuban DTOs transport indoor-grown marijuana from the region to distributors in the New York/New Jersey HIDTA region. Jamaican DTOs and criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine and marijuana into northern Florida from southern Florida and the Puerto Rico/USVI HIDTA region. African American criminal groups transport primarily powder cocaine, crack cocaine, and marijuana into the region. Caucasian criminal groups transport primarily diverted pharmaceuticals and ODDs into the region from source areas throughout the United States as well as Canada.

Traffickers also transport illicit drugs into the North Florida HIDTA region using the U.S. Postal Service and package delivery services. They may also transport drugs by using couriers on commercial flights and maritime conveyances. Drug traffickers and some abusers frequently transport illicit drugs such as marijuana, methamphetamine, and pharmaceutical drugs through package delivery services. In fact, several transshipment facilities and international parcel shipping companies are located in the Jacksonville area. Moreover, the Jacksonville International Airport<sup>11</sup> and the Port of

11. The Jacksonville International Airport provides nonstop flights to major U.S. cities, including those that serve as international gateways. More than a dozen major airlines and a network of regional carriers provide some 200 daily arrivals and departures at Jacksonville International Airport. Additionally, Jacksonville's passenger air service market has grown dramatically throughout the past decade. In 2006 the number of passengers using Jacksonville International Airport reached a record of 5,946,188 passengers, surpassing the 2000 record of 5,287,244 passengers. The extent of drug-related transportation through the Jacksonville International Airport is an intelligence gap.

Jacksonville<sup>12</sup> provide drug traffickers with additional opportunities to transport illicit drugs into and from northern Florida.

## 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 North Florida HIDTA region. Most midlevel and retail-level distributors, regardless of their race or ethnicity, depend on Mexican DTOs to supply them with these illicit drugs. 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 distributors.

Various DTOs, criminal groups, and local independent dealers distribute illicit drugs at the midlevel and retail level in the region. Their methods of operation change little from year to year. (See Table 4 on page 11.) 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. MDMA is generally distributed in dance clubs and is frequently abused in Gainesville (where a large college population resides) and Mayport (the location of numerous gentlemen's clubs).

12. The Port of Jacksonville is an international trade seaport in northeastern Florida and one of the largest seaports on the eastern seaboard of the continental United States. In fiscal year 2007 (the latest year for which such data are available) the seaport's three public marine terminals handled a total of 8.3 million tons of cargo. Moreover, the Port of Jacksonville transships more than 70 percent of U.S. waterborne commerce to and from Puerto Rico; Puerto Rico is a significant U.S. arrival zone for cocaine. Shipping from Puerto Rico to other parts of the United States, including northern Florida, is considered to be coastwise trade; therefore, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials do not routinely inspect such cargo. Nonetheless, the extent of drug-related transportation through the Port of Jacksonville is an intelligence gap.



Ice methamphetamine is not typically 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.

Traffickers facilitate drug sales in the North Florida HIDTA region using electronic communications, usually cellular telephones and the Internet. Drug traffickers typically use disposable cellular telephones and cellular telephones 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 primarily to facilitate prearranged meetings with individuals to conduct drug sales. They also use text messaging capabilities on these telephones to communicate and arrange meetings. 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. Draft e-mail 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.

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

Distributors	Wholesale Distribution	Midlevel Distribution	Retail Distribution
<b>African American</b>	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder and crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana, MDMA	Powder and crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, pharmaceutical drugs, methamphetamine (limited)
<b>Caucasian</b>	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder and crack cocaine, pharmaceutical drugs, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine	Powder cocaine, pharmaceutical drugs, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine
<b>Colombian</b>	Powder cocaine, heroin, MDMA	NA	NA
<b>Cuban</b>	High-potency marijuana	High-potency marijuana	NA
<b>Dominican</b>	Powder cocaine, heroin, MDMA	Powder cocaine, heroin, MDMA	NA
<b>Jamaican</b>	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, marijuana
<b>Mexican</b>	Powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, ice methamphetamine, marijuana
<b>Asian</b>	High-potency marijuana, MDMA	High-potency marijuana, MDMA	Powder cocaine, heroin, high-potency marijuana, MDMA

Source: North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.  
NA—Not applicable.



### DRUG-RELATED CRIME

High levels of violent and property crime in the North Florida HIDTA region are associated with the distribution and abuse of illicit drugs, particularly crack cocaine.<sup>13</sup> According to data from the NDTs 2007, 11 of the 12 local law enforcement agency respondents in the North Florida HIDTA region reported that crack cocaine was the drug that most contributed to violent crime and property crime in their jurisdictions. Moreover, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data reveal that violent crime in Jacksonville increased from 2006 to 2007—this report does not overtly link drug trafficking and violent crime. Preliminary UCR data from January 2007 through June 2007 (the latest period for which such data are available) indicate that violent crime in Jacksonville increased from 3,164 reported offenses from January through June 2006 to 3,947 reported offenses during the same period in 2007.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office reports that the number of homicides committed in Jacksonville increased from 136 in 2005 to 177 in 2007. Law enforcement officials report that many of the arrested and convicted individuals had previously been involved in drug trafficking and suspect that much of the violence in the area is a result of conflicts among rival drug distributors, particularly street gangs, over increasingly limited drug markets.

13. Many crimes perpetrated in the North 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.

14. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data also reveal that violent crime in Gainesville, Florida, increased from 2006 to 2007. Preliminary UCR data from January 2007 through June 2007 (the latest period for which such data are available) indicate that violent crime in Gainesville increased from 534 reported offenses from January through June 2006 to 564 reported offenses during that same period in 2007. Likewise, property crime increased from 2,567 reported offenses from January through June 2006 to 2,800 reported offenses during that same period in 2007.

### ABUSE

Marijuana is the primary illicit substance identified in treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Florida. However, the most negative drug-related societal and personal consequences are often associated with powder and crack cocaine (the second most identified 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 2002 through 2006 (the latest year for which data are available) exceeded the number of treatment admissions for abuse of cocaine, pharmaceutical drugs (including other opiates, tranquilizers, and sedatives), heroin, or amphetamines (which include methamphetamine).<sup>15</sup> (See Table 5 on page 13.) Moreover, 48.4 percent of marijuana-related treatment admissions in 2006 involved individuals between 12 and 17 years old at the time of admission, while 52.6 percent of smoked cocaine-related treatment admissions involved individuals between 21 and 35 years old at the time of admission.

Pharmaceutical drugs are widely available and frequently abused in the North Florida HIDTA region. The most commonly abused pharmaceutical drugs are prescription narcotics such as hydrocodone, methadone, and oxycodone and CNS depressants, such as the benzodiazepines Valium and Xanax. Florida medical examiner data reveal that the number of deaths associated with pharmaceutical drugs, used either alone or in combination with other drugs,<sup>16</sup> exceeded the number of deaths associated with cocaine and heroin in Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties, which are located in the North

15. Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) data are available only at the state level; thus, the number of admissions is reflective of the entire state of Florida and not only the North Florida HIDTA region. Additionally, in 2006 approximately 46 percent of TEDS admissions in Florida were referred to treatment through the criminal justice system compared with 38 percent of TEDS admissions at the national level.

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

Florida HIDTA region, during 2006 (the latest full year for which data are available). (See Table 6.) Moreover, law enforcement and public health officials in the region report that the average age among pharmaceutical drug abusers in the region is decreasing.

Methamphetamine, ODDs, and heroin are abused at low levels throughout most of the North Florida HIDTA region. Methamphetamine abuse levels, while low, are increasing because of the

rising availability of high-purity ice methamphetamine. Law enforcement officials report that most methamphetamine abusers are Caucasians. ODDs, particularly MDMA, available in the region are generally abused in combination with other substances, including alcohol, cocaine, and marijuana. MDMA is most commonly used by youth. Heroin availability and abuse are stable at low levels.

**Table 5. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities in Florida, 2002–2006\***

Drug	2002	2003	2004*	2005	2006
<b>Marijuana</b>	19,287	20,129	30,489	10,652	13,322
<b>Cocaine (by all routes of administration)</b>	17,368	16,648	21,511	8,918	11,074
<b>Pharmaceutical drugs**</b>	5,099	4,253	6,321	2,504	4,315
<b>Heroin</b>	5,078	4,021	4,227	1,222	1,782
<b>Amphetamines (including methamphetamine)</b>	741	1,022	1,753	893	1,051

Source: Treatment Episode Data Set, as of May 7, 2008.

\*Florida changed its methodology for reporting treatment admissions to TEDS between 2004 and 2005; this resulted in a significant decline in the number of reported treatment admissions between these years (public health officials believe significant duplicate admissions were occurring under the prior reporting mechanism). Additionally, trend analysis cannot be conducted for years prior to 2005 with current year data.

\*\*Pharmaceutical drugs include other opiates, tranquilizers, and sedatives.

**Table 6. Drug Mentions in Deceased Persons in Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties, 2003–2007\***

Drug	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>Pharmaceutical drugs**</b>	388	473	506	508	333
<b>Cocaine</b>	208	225	219	263	146
<b>Heroin</b>	7	5	5	4	2

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

\*January through July 2007.

\*\*Pharmaceutical drugs include benzodiazepines and prescription narcotics.



### ILLICIT FINANCE

Laundering drug proceeds in the North Florida HIDTA region typically involves the transportation of bulk currency from the region to the Southwest Border and southern Florida. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups are the primary transporters of bulk currency, typically using the same private and commercial vehicles used to transport drugs into the area. Colombian DTOs use Colombian and Dominican criminal groups to transport bulk currency to money laundering cells in southern Florida that use financial institutions and other methods, such as the Colombian Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE), to launder drug proceeds.<sup>17</sup>

Traffickers operating in the North Florida HIDTA region also launder money through other means, including 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, and hair salons. For instance, Cuban DTOs frequently reinvest drug profits in real estate in

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.

order to expand their production of high-potency indoor marijuana 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. Moreover, some criminal groups and street gangs are investing in upstart record labels and recording studios.

### OUTLOOK

The distribution and abuse of powder and crack cocaine will remain the primary drug threat in the North Florida HIDTA region. Demand for cocaine is strong, and Mexican DTOs are able to supply sufficient quantities to meet this demand. Levels of cocaine distribution and abuse in the region will most likely remain high or will increase, resulting in additional expenditures of law enforcement and public health resources to mitigate the associated violent and property crime and to pay for publicly funded treatment programs for cocaine abuse.

The dominance that Mexican DTOs exert over wholesale cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and ice methamphetamine distribution in the North 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 these communities and easily mask their drug distribution operations. In fact, Mexican DTOs may become more entrenched in the North Florida HIDTA region, and these traffickers may continue to expand their distribution operations into Florida as they gain additional market exposure.

The number and size of indoor cannabis grows 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 North Florida HIDTA region. 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.

## SOURCES

### Local, State, and Regional

Alachua and Columbia County Initiative  
Alachua County Sheriff's Office  
Baker County Sheriff's Office  
Bradford County Sheriff's Office  
Clay County Sheriff's Office  
Columbia County Sheriff's Office  
Crescent City Police Department  
Duval County Sheriff's Office  
Fernandina Beach Police Department  
Flagler County Sheriff's Office  
Gainesville Police Department  
Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office  
Green Cove Springs Police Department  
Jacksonville Beach Police Department  
Jacksonville Sheriff's Office  
Lake City Police Department  
Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Nassau County Sheriff's Office  
Ocala Police Department  
Orange Park Police Department  
Palatka Police Department  
Polk County Sheriff's Office  
Putnam County Sheriff's Office  
St. Augustine Beach Police Department  
St. Johns County Sheriff's Office  
State of Florida  
    Department of Corrections  
    Florida Department of Law Enforcement  
        Domestic Marijuana Eradication Indoor Grow Program  
        Medical Examiner's Commission  
        Tri-County Task Force  
    Highway Patrol  
        Contraband Interdiction Unit  
    Office of Drug Control  
Sumter County Sheriff's Office  
Unified Drug Enforcement Strike Team  
Union County Sheriff's Office  
University of North Florida Police Department  
Violent Crime Task Force, Jacksonville  
Williston Police Department

### Federal

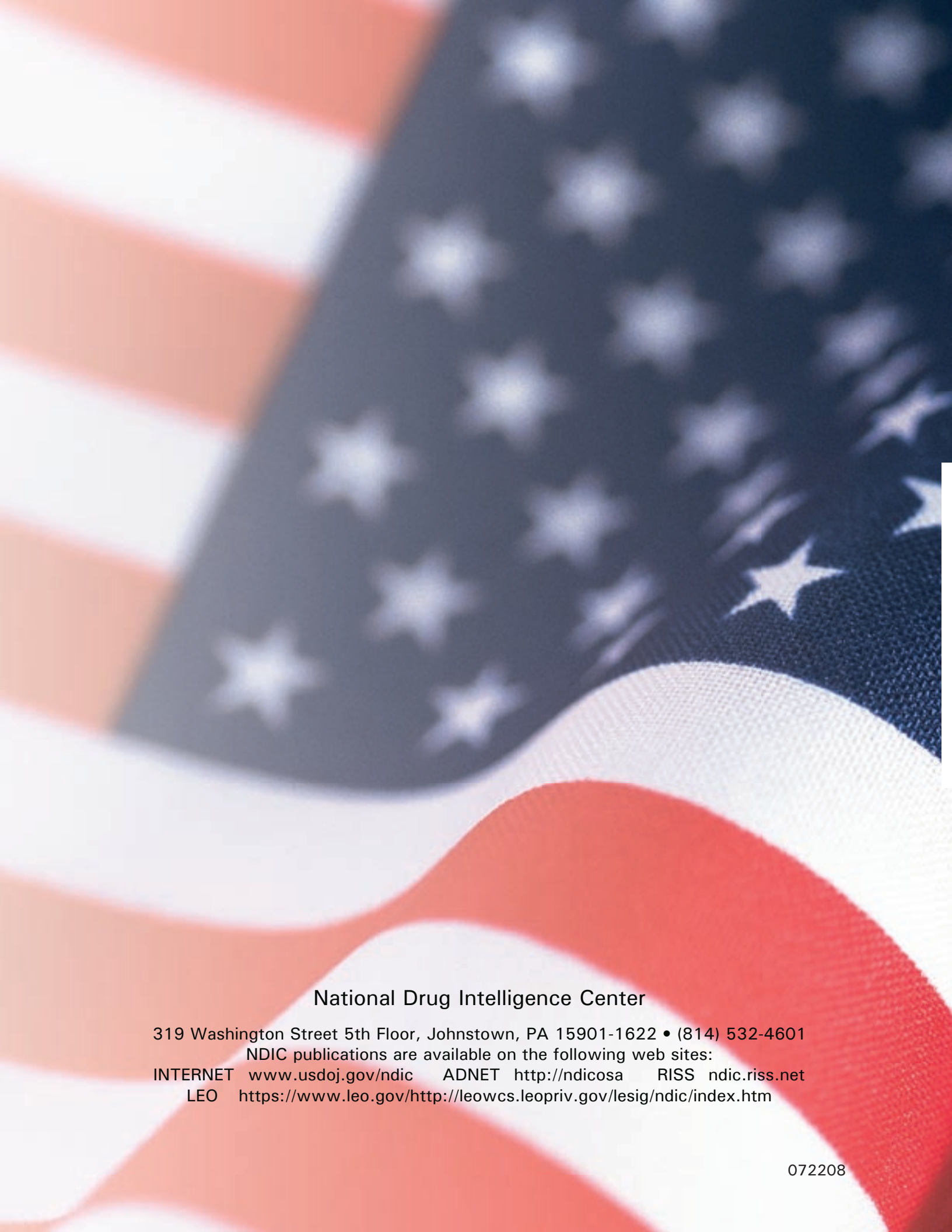
Executive Office of the President  
    Office of National Drug Control Policy  
        High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area  
        North Florida  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
    U.S. Census Bureau  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
    Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
        Office of Applied Studies  
        Treatment Episode Data Set  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
    U.S. Coast Guard  
    U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
U.S. Navy  
    Naval Criminal Investigative Service  
        Jacksonville  
        Mayport  
U.S. Postal Service  
U.S. Department of Justice  
    Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives  
    Drug Enforcement Administration  
        Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program  
        El Paso Intelligence Center  
        National Seizure System  
        Jacksonville District Office  
    Federal Bureau of Investigation  
        Uniform Crime Report  
U.S. Attorneys Offices  
    Middle District of Florida  
    Northern District of Florida  
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