



U.S. Department of Justice  
National Drug Intelligence Center



# Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



## Drug Market Analysis 2011

## **Source Summary Statement**

The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) has high confidence in this drug market analysis as it is based on multiple sources of information that have proved highly reliable in prior NDIC, law enforcement, and intelligence community reporting. Quantitative data, including seizure, eradication, and arrest statistics, were drawn from data sets maintained by federal, state, or local government agencies. Discussions of the prevalence and consequences of drug abuse are based on published reports from U.S. Government agencies and interviews with public health officials deemed reliable because of their expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of drug abuse. Trends and patterns related to drug production, trafficking, and abuse were identified through detailed analysis of coordinated counterdrug agency reporting and information. NDIC intelligence analysts and field intelligence officers obtained this information through numerous interviews with law enforcement and public health officials (federal, state, and local) in whom NDIC has a high level of confidence based on previous contact and reporting, their recognized expertise, and their professional standing and reputation within the U.S. counterdrug community. This report was reviewed and corroborated by law enforcement officials who have jurisdiction in the Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and possess an expert knowledge of its drug situation.



**U.S. Department of Justice  
National Drug Intelligence Center**



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## **Drug Market Analysis 2011**

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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## Executive Summary

The overall drug threat to the Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region has remained fairly consistent over the past year. Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) use the region as a principal area for large-scale ice methamphetamine and outdoor marijuana production. They also operate national- and regional-level transshipment and distribution operations within the region for other illicit drugs, including ice methamphetamine produced in Mexico. The Central Valley HIDTA region is a significant area for illegal cannabis cultivation operations, an increasing number of which are conducted under the umbrella of the state's medical marijuana law.

Key issues identified in the Central Valley HIDTA region include the following:

- Mexican DTOs and criminal groups based in the Central Valley HIDTA region continue to pose the principal organizational drug threat to the area because of their large-scale marijuana and methamphetamine production operations and the volume of illicit drugs they transport to the region from Mexico.<sup>1</sup>
- Methamphetamine trafficking and abuse are pervasive, rendering methamphetamine the greatest drug threat to the Central Valley HIDTA region. Despite declining laboratory seizures, the area remains a primary domestic methamphetamine production and supply area.
- Marijuana production, primarily by Mexican DTOs, is widespread throughout the Central Valley HIDTA region. The propensity for these growers to use violence while protecting their operations poses a growing threat to the safety of law enforcement personnel and the public.
- Criminal exploitation of state medical marijuana laws is contributing to extensive cannabis cultivation in the Central Valley HIDTA region. Some individuals are obtaining medical marijuana permits and collectively cultivating excessive amounts of cannabis at indoor and outdoor locations.
- Street gangs are contributing to increasing levels of crime, particularly violent crime, in some areas of the Central Valley HIDTA region.

## Key Issues<sup>a</sup>

**Mexican DTOs and criminal groups based in the Central Valley HIDTA region continue to pose the principal organizational drug threat to the area because of their large-scale marijuana and methamphetamine production operations in the region and the volume of illicit drugs they transport to the region from Mexico.**

Mexican DTOs exploit the Central Valley HIDTA region as a national-level production center for marijuana and methamphetamine and a transportation and distribution center for illicit drugs that they smuggle from Mexico into the area.<sup>2</sup> Some Mexican DTOs have based their marijuana and methamphetamine production and distribution operations in the Central Valley HIDTA region to minimize the risk of interdiction by law enforcement during cross-border trafficking.<sup>3</sup> The optimal climate and growing conditions in central California, which support the region's expansive agricultural industry, sustain widespread outdoor cannabis cultivation operations, conducted primarily by Mexican DTOs. Some of these DTOs are increasing their cultivation operations by operating multiple cannabis grow sites throughout the region and employing individuals highly skilled in agronomy to provide growers with training and guidance in order to enhance the output of their illicit cultivation operations.<sup>4</sup> To facilitate methamphetamine production, Mexican DTOs are conducting well-organized smurfing<sup>b</sup> operations that circumvent California's point-of-sale control measures, allowing them to obtain large amounts of pseudoephedrine for the production of ice methamphetamine in the superlabs<sup>c</sup> they operate throughout the region.<sup>5</sup> Their success in operating local marijuana and methamphetamine production operations in the area render the Central Valley HIDTA region a primary source area for these drugs in markets throughout the United States.<sup>6</sup> For example, HIDTA officials estimate that 85 percent of the methamphetamine produced in the region by Mexican DTOs is distributed to major domestic markets throughout the nation, such as Atlanta and Chicago.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the Mexican DTOs that operate in the region are deeply entrenched and well organized, with extensive networks linked to drug sources of supply in Guerrero, Michoacán, and Sinaloa, Mexico,<sup>8</sup> that enable them to supply illicit drug markets in the region and throughout much of the country. They transport large quantities of ice methamphetamine, marijuana, powder cocaine, and heroin from Mexico through U.S. ports of entry (POEs) in California to the area for regional- and national-level distribution. The region's highway infrastructure—offering direct access to domestic drug markets—enables these DTOs to easily transport illicit drugs to markets including those in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Canada.<sup>9</sup>

**Methamphetamine trafficking and abuse are pervasive, rendering methamphetamine the greatest drug threat to the Central Valley HIDTA region. Despite declining laboratory seizures, the area remains a primary domestic methamphetamine production and supply area.**

Most of the ice methamphetamine available in the area is transported by Mexican DTOs from source areas in Mexico or is produced by Mexican DTOs in clandestine laboratories in the region.<sup>10</sup> High levels of availability are evidenced by increased seizures of methamphetamine in the HIDTA

a. For a general overview of the Central Valley HIDTA region, see [Appendix A](#).

b. Smurfing is a method used by some methamphetamine and precursor chemical traffickers to acquire large quantities of pseudoephedrine. Individuals purchase pseudoephedrine in quantities at or below legal thresholds from multiple retail locations. Traffickers often enlist the assistance of several associates in smurfing operations to increase the speed with which chemicals are acquired.

c. Superlabs are laboratories capable of producing 10 or more pounds of methamphetamine in a single production cycle.



### Operation Breadbasket

In 2008, the Sacramento Sheriff's Department Narcotics Street Team, working with the Central Valley California HIDTA Substance Abuse Intervention and Treatment Team (SAINT), began investigating a Sacramento County midlevel polydrug cell with connections to a DTO in Michoacán, Mexico, that had been distributing an estimated 550 pounds of ice methamphetamine per month. The leader of the Sacramento County cell, a money courier for the DTO, supplemented his role by distributing ice methamphetamine and cocaine into and through Sacramento to nationwide destinations including Arizona, Louisiana, Nevada, New York, Utah, and Washington. According to evidence seized during the investigation, the distribution cell transported liquid methamphetamine across the Southwest Border to a house in Gilroy (Santa Clara County) for storage and conversion to ice methamphetamine. Law enforcement officials seized the Gilroy conversion laboratory in August 2010 and removed 459 pounds of packaged ice methamphetamine and 19 gallons (8 pounds per gallon) of liquid methamphetamine stored in insulated drink containers. Total seizures included 612 pounds of methamphetamine (75 pounds of which was blue-tinted ice methamphetamine), 10 kilograms of cocaine, 1,405 pounds of marijuana, \$62,846, two handguns, and three cars. The investigation also resulted in 11 arrests and identified a San Jose cell composed of a money launderer, drug couriers, and a regional "director" who coordinated money pickups and deliveries.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 1. Photographs of Gilroy Methamphetamine Conversion Laboratory**



California Department of Justice, Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement, San Jose Regional Office.

Source: Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area; Unified Narcotics Enforcement Team.

region and by law enforcement interviews and survey data indicating that the drug is widely available throughout the region.<sup>12</sup> Ice methamphetamine seizures attributed to Central Valley HIDTA initiatives more than tripled from 2009 (293 kg) to 2010 (1,094 kg).<sup>13</sup> (See Table 1 on page 4.) Moreover, 13 of the 27 state and local law enforcement agencies that responded to the National Drug

Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2011<sup>d</sup> indicate that methamphetamine availability is moderate or high in their jurisdictions. In addition, 20 of the 27 agency respondents indicate that methamphetamine is the drug that contributes most to violent crime, and 25 of the 27 identify methamphetamine as the greatest drug threat in their jurisdictions.<sup>14</sup> (See Table 2.) In San Joaquin, law enforcement personnel report that approximately 95 percent of drug investigations are methamphetamine-related.<sup>15</sup> High levels of abuse also contribute to the threat posed by methamphetamine. For instance, health care professionals indicate that methamphetamine accounted for nearly 41 percent of all drug treatment admissions in the HIDTA region in 2010.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, California treatment providers identified methamphetamine more often than any other drug as the primary substance of abuse in treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in the region from 2006 through 2010.<sup>17</sup> Treatment admissions for methamphetamine abuse have been trending downward since 2007, largely as a result of state funding cuts to publicly funded treatment providers.<sup>18</sup> (See Figure 2 on page 5.)

**Table 1. Drug Seizures Through Central Valley HIDTA Initiatives, by Drug, in Kilograms, 2007–2010**

	Cocaine	Heroin	Ice Methamphetamine	Marijuana
<b>2007</b>	45	3	151	3,080
<b>2008</b>	121	23	657	3,358
<b>2009</b>	177	52	293	3,284
<b>2010</b>	325	30	1,094	10,927

Source: Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

**Table 2. Central Valley HIDTA Law Enforcement Responses to the National Drug Threat Survey 2011, by Number of Respondents**

Drug	Greatest Drug Threat	Most Contributes to Violent Crime*	Most Contributes to Property Crime
<b>Ice Methamphetamine</b>	20	17	18
<b>Powder Methamphetamine</b>	5	3	6
<b>Crack Cocaine</b>	0	2	0
<b>Heroin</b>	0	0	2
<b>Marijuana</b>	1	4	0
<b>Controlled Prescription Drugs</b>	1	0	1

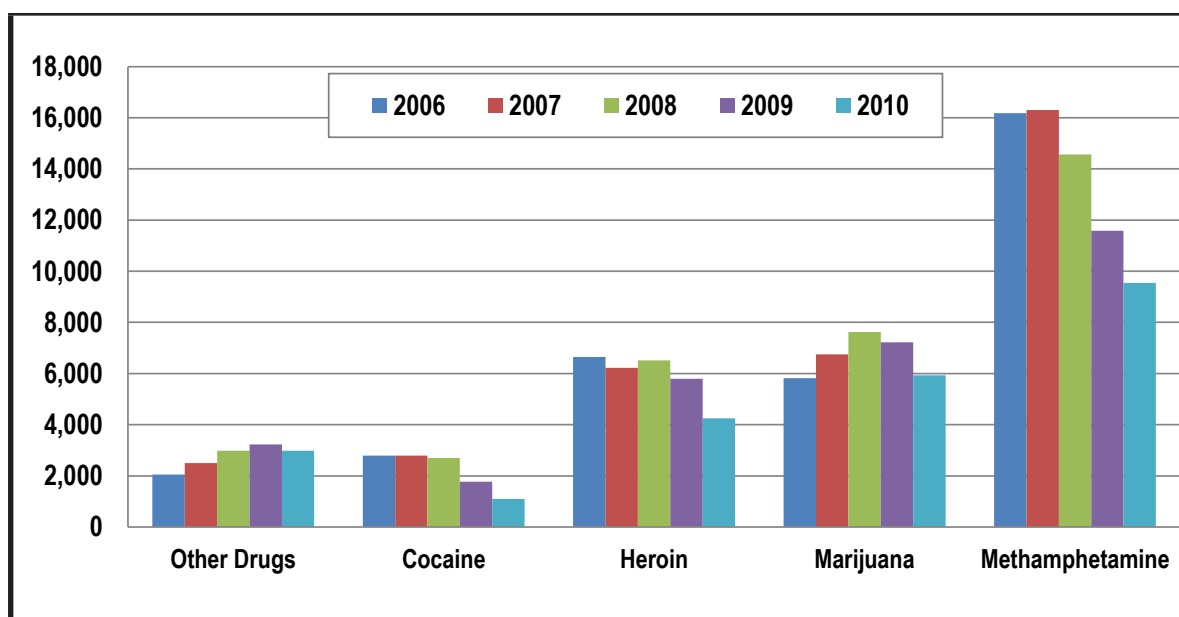
Source: National Drug Threat Survey 2011.

Total number of respondents: 27

\*Includes one "Don't know" response.

d. The NDTS is conducted annually by NDIC to solicit information from a representative sample of state and local law enforcement agencies. NDIC uses this information to produce national, regional, and state estimates of various aspects of drug trafficking activities. NDTS data reflect agencies' perceptions based on their analysis of criminal activities that occurred within their jurisdictions during the past year. NDTS 2011 data cited in this report are raw, unweighted responses from federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies solicited through either NDIC or the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) HIDTA program as of February 25, 2011.

**Figure 2. Central Valley HIDTA Drug Treatment Admissions, 2006–2010**



Source: California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, Office of Applied Research and Analysis.

Note: 2010 data are preliminary, as of May 16, 2011.

The Central Valley HIDTA region is the primary methamphetamine production area in California and one of the largest in the United States. Nearly 45 percent (75 of 168) of the clandestine laboratories and 5 of the 7 superlabs<sup>19</sup> seized in California in 2010 were located in the HIDTA region.<sup>20</sup> (See Table 3 on page 6.) Although laboratory seizures in the region have declined over the past 5 years as a result of regulatory efforts to control precursor chemicals with point-of-sale restrictions, the region remains a prominent domestic production area.<sup>21</sup> Local methamphetamine producers, primarily Mexican DTOs and criminal groups, acquire pseudoephedrine by conducting well-organized smurfing operations to circumvent the point-of-sale control measures. Central Valley HIDTA officials report that groups based in Maricopa County (AZ) and Reno (NV) conduct smurfing operations in those areas to obtain large quantities of pseudoephedrine that they transport to the Central Valley HIDTA region to sustain methamphetamine production operations.<sup>22</sup>

**Table 3. Methamphetamine Clandestine Laboratory Removals in Central Valley HIDTA Counties, 2006–2010**

Year	Items Seized	Fresno	Kern	Kings	Madera	Merced	Sacramento	San Joaquin	Shasta	Stanislaus	Tulare	HIDTA Total	CA State Total
2006	Abandonments	26	0	1	3	41	3	10	1	75	9	169	224
	Laboratories	4	2	0	0	10	10	21	3	10	8	68	252
	Total	30	2	1	3	51	13	31	4	85	17	237	476
2007	Cleanup Costs	\$64,646	\$3,281	\$2,434	\$7,217	\$99,400	\$25,609	\$64,672	\$7,286	\$146,106	\$34,704	\$455,355	\$1,005,257
	Abandonments	30	2	1	12	73	0	6	0	22	5	151	189
	Laboratories	5	6	2	1	2	6	8	2	5	2	39	163
2008	Total	35	8	3	13	75	6	14	2	27	7	190	352
	Cleanup Costs	\$68,313	\$17,630	\$3,831	\$26,950	\$157,883	\$9,738	\$20,925	\$2,419	\$49,693	\$12,014	\$369,396	\$772,921
	Abandonments	9	5	0	14	68	1	8	1	43	8	157	190
2009	Laboratories	5	1	0	3	12	3	8	0	16	3	51	184
	Total	14	6	0	17	80	4	16	1	59	11	208	374
	Cleanup Costs	\$25,703	\$24,327	NA	\$54,108	\$262,738	\$7,778	\$42,677	\$1,280	\$136,934	\$29,122	\$584,667	\$1,026,767
2010	Abandonments	6	3	0	6	32	3	11	2	22	2	87	114
	Laboratories	1	2	0	0	4	4	3	4	11	3	32	124
	Total	7	5	0	6	36	7	14	6	33	5	119	238
2010	Cleanup Costs	\$15,625	\$12,624	NA	\$26,690	\$119,277	\$27,115	\$47,914	\$12,393	\$130,750	\$18,588	\$410,976	\$775,298
	Abandonments	2	0	0	5	16	0	6	1	11	1	42	50
	Laboratories	4	3	0	1	10	1	3	3	7	1	33	118
2010	Total	6	3	0	6	26	1	9	4	18	2	75	168
	Cleanup Costs	\$20,831	\$11,666	NA	\$26,692	\$123,233	\$2,400	\$25,865	\$8,999	\$67,324	\$5,058	\$292,068	\$500,924

Source: California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

Note: An abandonment is either a dumpsite or an incomplete laboratory and can include items such as chemical containers, glassware, and equipment.

NA—Not applicable

**Marijuana production, primarily by Mexican DTOs, is widespread throughout the Central Valley HIDTA region. The propensity for these growers to use violence while protecting their operations poses a growing threat to the safety of law enforcement personnel and the public.**

California, including the Central Valley HIDTA region, remains one of the most significant outdoor cannabis cultivation areas in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) data indicate that 90 percent (nearly 8.9 million) of the 9,866,766 outdoor cannabis plants eradicated in the United States in 2010 were in only seven states—California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia (commonly referred to as the Marijuana Seven, or M7, states). DCE/SP data further indicate that 7,204,355 plants were eradicated from outdoor grow sites in California alone. Moreover, the Central Valley HIDTA region accounted for more than 20 percent (1,500,529) of the outdoor plants eradicated in the state that year.<sup>24</sup> (See Table 4 on page 8.)

Outdoor cannabis cultivation by Mexican DTOs on public lands, in national forests, and on private properties in the region is pervasive.<sup>25</sup> For example, in 2010, the Shasta-Trinity, Los Padres, Sequoia, Lassen, and Sierra National Forests, all located in the Central Valley HIDTA region, ranked among the top 10 national forests for eradication of cannabis plants on National Forest System lands in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Mexican DTOs employ individuals highly skilled in agronomy to visit these cannabis grow sites and provide growers with instruction on various topics, including how to make the best use of terrain; how to construct irrigation systems; and when to fertilize, trim, and harvest cannabis crops.<sup>27</sup> Expanding cannabis cultivation in the region is increasing the strain on law enforcement resources by necessitating heightened enforcement and cleanup efforts.<sup>28</sup> (See text box.) Law enforcement resource limitations entice growers to cultivate cannabis on public lands, where the risk of detection is lower.<sup>29</sup> As further incentive to growers, marijuana grows located on public lands or in national forests are not subject to asset forfeiture.<sup>30</sup> (See Table 5 on page 9 and Figure 3 on page 10.)

### Operation Trident

Operation Trident, a multiagency cannabis eradication effort on public lands in Madera, Fresno, and Tulare Counties, commenced in 2009. The investigation identified 126 marijuana grows throughout the tricounty area and, as of February 2011, resulted in the seizure of 663,898 cannabis plants and 6,934 pounds of processed marijuana as well as more than 130 arrests. Eradication and reclamation teams discovered and removed thousands of pounds of toxic fertilizers and trash—materials that contaminate groundwater and destroy fish and wildlife habitat. Additionally, teams dismantled and removed miles of makeshift irrigation systems that were used to water cannabis plants. Diversion and redirection of natural water sources in this manner commonly leads to erosion and negatively impacts native vegetation. The typical cost to remove such nonnative material is approximately \$11,000 per acre.<sup>31</sup>

Source: U.S. Attorney, Eastern District of California; Drug Enforcement Administration.

The propensity for violence exhibited by Mexican DTOs and others while protecting their grow sites poses a significant threat to the safety of both law enforcement personnel and the public.<sup>32</sup> Cultivators operating large grows on national forests and public lands in the region often arm themselves with weapons to protect their crops, thereby posing a danger to law enforcement personnel and unwitting visitors, hunters, and hikers.<sup>33</sup> In Fresno, Kern, Madera, and Tulare Counties, all of which have extensive cannabis grow operations, law enforcement officials report that marijuana is the drug that contributes most to violent crime in their jurisdictions.<sup>34</sup> In September 2010, Kern County deputies—accompanied by U.S. Forest Service and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) officials—conducted a raid at a marijuana grow site in the Greenhorn Mountains, where they encountered an armed grower who brandished a rifle at them and was subsequently wounded by the raid team.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, some individuals who possess medical marijuana permits to cultivate cannabis have resorted to violence to protect their crops from thieves. In January 2011, a Fresno man who possessed a medical marijuana permit to cultivate cannabis was convicted of voluntary manslaughter in the September 2010 shooting death of an intruder in his backyard marijuana garden.<sup>36</sup> Also in September 2010, an elderly Fresno woman armed herself with a machete to protect her marijuana garden from would-be thieves, one of whom shot and injured an elderly man at the residence.<sup>37</sup> The Fresno County Board of Supervisors responded to this surge of violence by passing an ordinance on September 14, 2010, prohibiting outdoor cultivation of medical marijuana in unincorporated areas of the county for a 45-day period.<sup>38</sup> On October 26, 2010, this ordinance was extended pending the development of standards and regulations relating to cannabis cultivation.<sup>39</sup> Growers in the region also use booby traps at both outdoor and indoor grow sites to deter law enforcement personnel and potential thieves.<sup>40</sup>

**Table 4. Cannabis Plants Seized in the Central Valley HIDTA Region, 2006–2010**

	Outdoor Plants					Indoor Plants				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>HIDTA Total</b>	<b>651,972</b>	<b>1,120,782</b>	<b>1,252,065</b>	<b>1,687,095</b>	<b>1,500,529</b>	<b>33,165</b>	<b>11,962</b>	<b>4,820</b>	<b>10,943</b>	<b>14,121</b>
<b>State Total</b>	<b>2,791,726</b>	<b>4,791,838</b>	<b>5,139,451</b>	<b>7,365,760</b>	<b>7,204,355</b>	<b>203,559</b>	<b>160,138</b>	<b>182,602</b>	<b>153,820</b>	<b>188,297</b>

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.



**Table 5. Top 10 National Forests for Cannabis Plant Eradications in the United States, by Number of Plants, 2010**

1	Shasta-Trinity, CA*	505,716
2	Stanislaus, CA	452,488
3	San Bernardino, CA	393,879
4	Los Padres, CA*	325,985
5	Sequoia, CA*	317,307
6	Angeles, CA	232,577
7	Mendocino, CA	215,042
8	Lassen, CA*	177,340
9	Plumas, CA	99,703
10	Sierra, CA*	87,860

Source: U.S. Forest Service, data as of February 3, 2011.

\*Central Valley HIDTA Region.

**Criminal exploitation of state medical marijuana laws is contributing to extensive cannabis cultivation in the Central Valley HIDTA region. Some individuals are obtaining medical marijuana permits and collectively cultivating excessive amounts of cannabis at indoor and outdoor locations.**

Central Valley HIDTA officials report that some growers in the region are obtaining medical marijuana permits and cultivating cannabis in excess of the limits authorized by California Proposition 215,<sup>e</sup> which regulates the cultivation, distribution, and use of marijuana for medical purposes.<sup>41</sup> These cultivators commonly take the position that possession of the permits “legitimizes” their for-profit enterprises.<sup>42</sup> Law enforcement officers in the region report that California Proposition 215 is often exploited by seemingly legitimate medical marijuana growers who deliberately exceed the prescribed limits for the amount of processed marijuana that may be possessed or the number of plants that may be under cultivation at any one time.<sup>43</sup> To illustrate, some criminal groups and individuals operating in the region are obtaining and posting medical marijuana permits and are cultivating cannabis for profit at outdoor and indoor locations. (See text box, “‘Profit Motive’ Proven in Fresno County Medicinal Marijuana Case,” on page 11.) They often commingle marijuana with legitimate crops at outdoor grow sites typically located on privately owned properties. Many operate multiple indoor marijuana operations in the Central Valley HIDTA region, where they purchase houses in residential neighborhoods and make renovations that are conducive to marijuana production.<sup>44</sup> In January 2011, law enforcement officials seized four separate grow houses in Elk Grove (CA) that were operated by a DTO with connections to Seattle (WA) and Portland (OR). Four individuals were arrested, and 891 cannabis plants were seized.<sup>45</sup> Cultivators are also increasing their use of buildings in rural areas as locations for indoor grow operations. (See text box, “Indoor Marijuana Grow Seized in Stanislaus County Largest in History,” on page 11.) The rising number of indoor grow operations has resulted in increased eradication by law enforcement officers—from 10,943 indoor plants in 2009 to 14,121 indoor plants in 2010.<sup>46</sup> (See Table 4 on page 8.)

e. California Compassionate Use Act of 1996, Health and Safety Code 11362.5.

**Figure 3. Cannabis Plants Eradicated in the Central Valley HIDTA Region, by County, 2010**





### **“Profit Motive” Proven in Fresno County Medicinal Marijuana Case**

In November 2010, the U.S. Attorneys Office, Eastern District of California; DEA; and the Fresno County Sheriff’s Office charged six DTO members—who had been producing marijuana for profit under the guise of medical purposes—with conspiring to manufacture, distribute, and possess with intent to distribute marijuana. The members had obtained individual medical marijuana permits and had been collectively producing the marijuana in adjacent plots in a rural area of Fresno County. They posted their individual permits at all of the plots, which were fenced, gated, and locked. The investigation determined that DTO members had transported marijuana by private vehicles to destinations outside California, including Boston, where it was sold for \$3,000 per pound—three times the selling price in Fresno. In November 2010, a Utah Highway Patrol trooper arrested two members of the DTO during a traffic stop in Cedar City and seized 180 pounds of marijuana. The trooper dispatched a drug-detection canine after the men exhibited suspicious behavior and provided conflicting stories regarding the nature of their travel.<sup>47</sup>

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Source: U.S. Attorney, Eastern District of California.

### **Indoor Marijuana Grow Seized in Stanislaus County Largest in History**

In February 2011, narcotics agents from the Stanislaus County Drug Enforcement Agency, the Central Valley HIDTA, the California Multi-Jurisdictional Methamphetamine Enforcement Team, and DEA seized the largest indoor marijuana grow in Stanislaus County history. Acting on a tip, agents served a search warrant at a barn located in a rural area of west Stanislaus County and discovered more than 2,000 cannabis plants inside the 240- by 40-foot building. Growers had equipped the building with a large commercial generator and sophisticated lighting, irrigation, and heating systems and had been using the basement to process the marijuana. Officials estimated that the grow site—operated by an Asian DTO from San Francisco—was capable of producing up to 500 pounds of finished product every 3 months. Agents arrested six individuals and seized four rifles and one handgun.<sup>48</sup>

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Source: Modesto Police Department.

**Street gangs are contributing to increasing levels of crime, particularly violent crime, in some areas of the Central Valley HIDTA region.**

Street gangs operating within the Central Valley HIDTA region are responsible for much of the violent crime in areas where they have a presence.<sup>49</sup> According to the NDTs 2011, law enforcement officials in Fresno, Kern, Merced, Modesto, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Stockton Counties report having more than 30 gangs—each with more than 1,000 members—operating within their jurisdictions.<sup>50</sup> High concentrations of gang members in areas such as Fresno contribute to increasing levels of violent crime, including home invasion, assault and battery, carjacking, robbery, and homicide.<sup>51</sup> In 2009, gang-related homicides accounted for nearly 40 percent of all homicides in California—an increase from 18 percent in 2008.<sup>52</sup> Law enforcement officers report that violent acts perpetrated by street gang members are often associated with drug distribution,<sup>53</sup> however, gang members also commit acts of violence in order to defend or expand territories, achieve financial gain, or establish and maintain their reputations.

Many street gangs in the region rely on drug trafficking as a major source of income.<sup>54</sup> For example, African American and Hispanic street gangs, primarily affiliates of the Sureños and Norteños gangs, distribute methamphetamine, MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy), and crack cocaine, and Asian street gangs distribute MDMA and high-potency marijuana.<sup>55</sup> Some gangs in the region have multiple sources of income, including prostitution, piracy of legitimate goods (DVDs, designer handbags, clothing, etc.), theft, and the operation of retail businesses such as tire shops and cell phone stores.<sup>56</sup> The Dog Pound, the most influential African American gang in Fresno, is also involved in transporting female juveniles to out-of-state locations for the purpose of sexual exploitation.<sup>57</sup>

## Outlook

NDIC assesses with high confidence<sup>f</sup> that the Central Valley HIDTA region will remain a prominent production and distribution area for ice methamphetamine and marijuana distributed to the area and throughout the United States. NDIC assesses with high confidence that Mexican DTOs operating in the region will expand organized pseudoephedrine smurfing operations into other states to avoid law enforcement scrutiny near production sites located in the region.

NDIC assess with high confidence that the availability of and demand for high-potency marijuana will increase in the near term as cannabis cultivators, seeking to generate higher profits, expand operations under the pretext of California's medicinal marijuana law. NDIC assesses with medium confidence that DTOs and criminal groups of all ethnicities, as well as local independents, will increase their use of dwellings in residential areas and warehouses, barns, and large buildings in rural areas to house sophisticated cultivation operations. Mexican DTOs will remain the primary cultivators of cannabis at outdoor locations. NDIC assess with high confidence that violence associated with cannabis cultivation will increase in the Central Valley HIDTA region in the short term as armed growers intensify efforts to protect crops from theft by rival DTOs and detection by law enforcement personnel.

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f. **High Confidence** generally indicates that the judgments are based on high-quality information or that the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment. **Medium Confidence** generally means that the information is credibly sourced and plausible but can be interpreted in various ways, or is not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. **Low Confidence** generally means that the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make a solid analytic inference, or that there are significant concerns or problems with the sources.

## Appendix A. Central Valley HIDTA Region Overview

### Map A1. Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



The Central Valley HIDTA region comprises the 10 counties of Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Stanislaus, and Tulare. The region encompasses nearly 32,000 square miles in central California, with a population of nearly 5.5 million.<sup>58</sup> The region includes metropolitan areas, such as Bakersfield, Fresno, Modesto, Redding, Sacramento, and Stockton, as well as expansive, sparsely populated rural areas. (See Map A1 in Appendix A.) Interstate 80, a major east-west corridor, connects San Francisco to New York City. Interstate 5, a north-south corridor, provides direct access to the area from the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa POEs at the U.S.–Mexico border in southern California and from the Blaine (WA) POE at the U.S.–Canada border. The Central Valley HIDTA region’s highway infrastructure and direct access to drug sources located along the Southwest Border, in Mexico, and in Canada enable drug traffickers to transport significant quantities of ice methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and MDMA into and through the HIDTA region for local consumption and to drug markets throughout the United States. Mexican DTOs transport drugs across the Southwest Border to San Jose and the Central Valley, including Modesto, Sacramento, and Stockton.<sup>59</sup> Sacramento’s location at the intersection of Interstates 5 and 80 helps facilitate the transportation of illicit drugs smuggled to, and produced in, the region to locations throughout the United States, including Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, and Tennessee, as well as the Pacific Northwest and Canada.<sup>60</sup>

Ice methamphetamine production and abuse have consistently posed the greatest drug threats in the Central Valley HIDTA region.<sup>61</sup> Most of the ice methamphetamine available in the area is transported by Mexican DTOs from source areas in Mexico or is produced in local clandestine laboratories in the HIDTA region, which remains a prominent area for methamphetamine production.<sup>62</sup> Mexican DTOs have succeeded in producing methamphetamine in superlabs in the region as a result of the organized pseudoephedrine smurfing operations they have expanded into southern California, Arizona, and Nevada to avoid law enforcement scrutiny near production sites.<sup>63</sup> To evade law enforcement detection, methamphetamine producers often burn or bury the waste from laboratory sites because they are aware that investigators examine material at dumpsites to identify operators and laboratory locations.<sup>64</sup> HIDTA officials report that methamphetamine producers dump waste into local canals or bury it on farms, private properties, and public lands.<sup>65</sup> This practice can cause serious injury to unsuspecting passersby and present significant hazards to the environment.

Marijuana availability and production are widespread in the Central Valley HIDTA region because of the continued high levels of abuse and the growing demand for marijuana throughout the region and the United States.<sup>66</sup> Mexican DTOs have increased their use of public lands and rural locations for cannabis cultivation and are straining law enforcement resources by necessitating increased enforcement and cleanup efforts.<sup>67</sup> Exploitation of medicinal marijuana laws is contributing to extensive cannabis cultivation in the Central Valley HIDTA region. Some cultivators are obtaining medical marijuana permits and collectively cultivating excessive amounts of cannabis at indoor and outdoor locations.<sup>68</sup> The propensity for growers to use violence while protecting their operations poses a growing threat to public safety and law enforcement personnel.<sup>69</sup>

Law enforcement reporting, seizure statistics, and lower wholesale prices indicate that cocaine availability is increasing in some areas of the Central Valley HIDTA region.<sup>70</sup> Of the 27 respondents to the NDTs 2011, 20 report that powder cocaine availability is moderate or high in their jurisdictions.<sup>71</sup> Further, Central Valley HIDTA officials noted an increase in cocaine seizures from 177 kilograms in 2009 to 325 kilograms in 2010.<sup>72</sup> (See Table 1 on page 4.)

In May 2011, law enforcement officials in Sacramento reported decreasing kilogram prices (from a range of \$25,000 to \$26,000 to a range of \$18,000 to \$20,000), a possible indication that cocaine availability is on the rise in the city.<sup>73</sup> Los Angeles is the primary domestic source city for cocaine available in the Central Valley HIDTA region. Traffickers operating in the region supply cocaine to markets in the Pacific Northwest (Oregon and Washington); to other states, including Alabama, Louisiana, Michigan, and Nevada; and to Canada.<sup>74</sup>

Controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) and heroin pose lower threats in the region than methamphetamine, marijuana, and cocaine.<sup>75</sup> CPDs are readily available, with abuse occurring among all demographic groups.<sup>76</sup> Distributors and abusers commonly divert CPDs through doctor-shopping, drug thefts, prescription forgeries, and Internet purchases.<sup>77</sup> The most commonly abused CPDs in the region are prescription opioid pain relievers.<sup>78</sup> Adderall and OxyContin continue to be abused among young adults and college age individuals in the area.<sup>79</sup> Treatment providers in the region report that some prescription opioid abusers are switching to heroin as they increase their tolerance to prescription opioids, such as OxyContin, and seek a more euphoric high or when the availability of heroin is greater than that of the prescription opioids they typically abuse.<sup>80</sup> Heroin availability increased in the region from 2007 to 2009. In 2009, 52 kilograms of heroin were seized through HIDTA initiatives. Although seizures decreased to 30 kilograms in 2010, law enforcement officials in Sacramento reported that by May 2011 demand for the drug was increasing.<sup>81</sup> Of the 27 respondents to the NDTs 2011, 21 report moderate or high levels of heroin availability in their jurisdictions, representing each of the HIDTA counties.<sup>82</sup> Increased demand for heroin may be attributed in part to the 2010 reformulation of OxyContin,<sup>g</sup> designed to make the tablets more difficult to abuse. Mexican black tar heroin is the most available and preferred type of heroin in the area; however, Southwest and Southeast Asian heroin are also available.<sup>83</sup> Public treatment admissions for heroin abuse totaled 3,967 in 2010, ranking the drug third behind methamphetamine (9,345) and marijuana (5,662). (See Figure 2 on page 5.)

MDMA is frequently abused in San Jose, San Francisco, and the Central Valley region.<sup>84</sup> Asian DTOs and other traffickers typically transport the drug from Canada to Los Angeles and exchange it for cocaine, which they transport to Canada.<sup>85</sup> MDMA is distributed from Los Angeles to other California drug markets, including the Central Valley HIDTA region, where the drug is regularly abused by teenagers, college students, and young adults.<sup>86</sup> GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), ketamine, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), PCP (phencyclidine), psilocybin, and Rohypnol (flunitrazepam) are also distributed to varying degrees throughout the region.

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g. In August 2010, the manufacturer of OxyContin, an extended-release semisynthetic opioid analgesic, introduced a new tablet formulation that includes additional inactive ingredients to make it more difficult for abusers to snort or inject the drug. The new tablets are difficult to cut, break, chew, crush, or dissolve. Treatment provider reporting indicates that some OxyContin abusers have developed methods to circumvent the physical properties of the new formulation. Some opioid abusers, who typically are not selective about the type or brand of opioid they abuse, have decided to avoid the new OxyContin formulation and have switched to other prescription opioids (such as immediate-release oxycodone products and immediate- or extended-release oxycodone products) or heroin.

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Farmersville Police Department  
Fresno County Multi Agency Gang Enforcement Consortium  
Fresno County Sheriff's Office  
Fresno Police Department  
Galt Police Department  
Kerman Police Department  
Kern County Sheriff's Office  
Kings County Sheriff's Department  
Madera County Sheriff's Office  
Merced County Sheriff's Department  
Merced Police Department  
Modesto Police Department  
Oakdale Police Department  
Redding Police Department  
Sacramento County Sheriff's Department  
Sacramento Police Department  
San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department  
Santa Cruz County Anti-Crime Team  
Shasta County Sheriff's Department  
Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department  
State of California  
    Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs  
        Office of Applied Research and Analysis  
Department of Justice  
    Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement  
        Central Valley Marijuana Investigation Team  
        San Jose Regional Office  
        Unified Narcotics Enforcement Team  
Department of Toxic Substances Control  
Office of the Attorney General  
    Fresno Methamphetamine Task Force  
Stockton Police Department  
Tulare County Sheriff's Office  
Visalia Police Department

## Federal

- Executive Office of the President
  - Office of National Drug Control Policy
    - High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
      - Central Valley
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  - U.S. Forest Service
    - National Forest System
- U.S. Department of Commerce
  - U.S. Census Bureau
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
    - Treatment Episode Data Set
- U.S. Department of Justice
  - Drug Enforcement Administration
    - Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program
    - El Paso Intelligence Center
      - National Seizure System
    - Sacramento District Office
    - San Jose Resident Office
    - San Francisco Division
  - Office of Justice Programs
    - Bureau of Justice Assistance
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      - Western States Information Network
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- The Bakersfield Californian*
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