



U.S. Department of Justice
National Drug Intelligence Center



New Mexico 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 New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and possess an expert knowledge of its drug situation.



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This assessment is an outgrowth of a partnership between the NDIC and HIDTA Program for preparation of annual assessments depicting drug trafficking trends and developments in HIDTA Program areas. The report has been coordinated with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.

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Executive Summary

The overall drug threat to the New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region has intensified somewhat over the past year, resulting in several areas of growing concern for law enforcement and public health officials. Methamphetamine is the foremost drug threat to the region, and Mexican traffickers are elevating this threat by supplying increasing quantities of the drug, resulting in high levels of availability and abuse. Heroin availability and rising levels of abuse, particularly among younger users, are also a growing concern to law enforcement and public health officials in the region.

Key issues identified in the New Mexico HIDTA region include the following:

- Increased availability of Mexican methamphetamine in the New Mexico HIDTA region has resulted in a substantial reduction in local methamphetamine production and higher levels of abuse among youth.
- Heroin is a persistent problem, particularly in northern New Mexico HIDTA counties. Availability of the drug is rising, corresponding with an upward trend in heroin treatment admissions among younger abusers, who are becoming increasingly involved in smuggling the drug into the region from Mexico.
- Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are increasingly using ultralights and other small aircraft to smuggle illicit drugs into the region from Mexico.

Key Issues^a

Increased availability of Mexican methamphetamine in the New Mexico HIDTA region has resulted in a substantial reduction in local methamphetamine production and higher levels of abuse among youth.

Mexican DTOs are smuggling increasing amounts of methamphetamine into the New Mexico HIDTA region, resulting in more seizures of the drug and largely mitigating the need for local production.¹ Increasing availability of methamphetamine in the region is largely attributed to greater production in Mexico after several years of decline.² In 2007, the Mexican Government announced a prohibition on ephedrine and pseudoephedrine imports into Mexico for 2008 and a ban on the use of both chemicals by 2009. By mid to late 2008, Mexican DTOs had adapted their production operations by finding new sources of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine precursors and by increasing their implementation of non-ephedrine-based methods of methamphetamine production in Mexico, such as the phenyl-2-propanone (P2P) method.³ According to the U.S. State Department's *2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 217 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in Mexico in 2009, compared with 57 in 2008.⁴ In 2010, 63 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in Mexico as of May 20 (the latest data available).

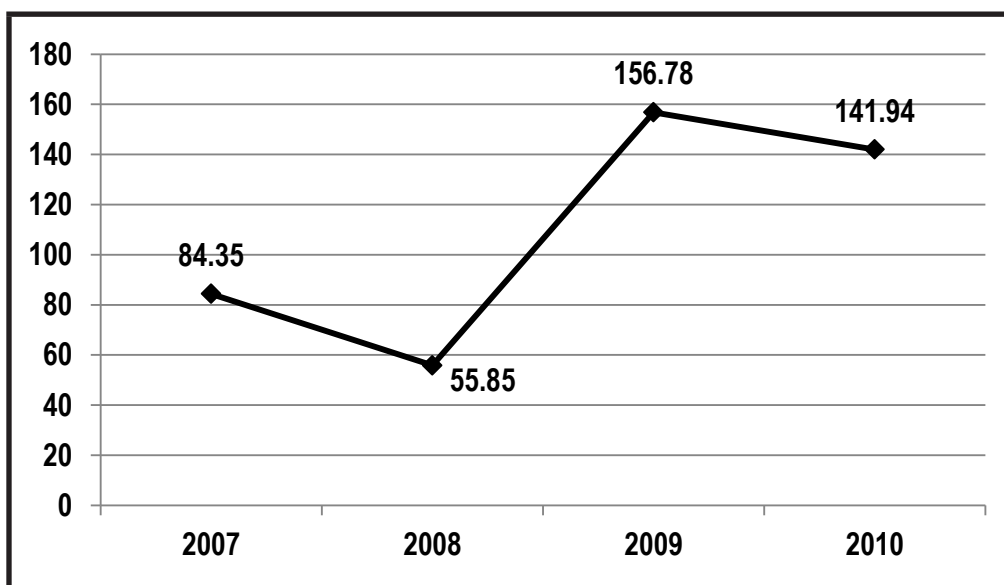
High levels of Mexican methamphetamine availability and lower local production are evidenced by law enforcement reporting, seizure data, and relatively low and stable prices for the drug.⁵ For example, the Las Cruces–Dona Ana County Metro Narcotics Agency reports that methamphetamine seizures in its area of responsibility nearly tripled to almost 151 pounds in 2010 compared with 2009, with virtually all of this methamphetamine produced in Mexico. New Mexico State Police data also show an upward trend in methamphetamine seizures, from 33,000 grams in 2008 to more than 89,000 grams in 2009 (the latest data available), with a concurrent decrease in local methamphetamine laboratory seizures from 83 in 2008 to 36 in 2009. Laboratory seizures by New Mexico HIDTA initiatives also decreased, from 38 seizures in 2009 to 31 in 2010.⁶ More recent data from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) also indicate high levels of methamphetamine availability and lower local production.⁷ DEA methamphetamine seizures decreased slightly, from 156.78 kilograms in 2009 to 141.94 kilograms in 2010 (see Figure 1 on page 3); however, the total quantity seized was still well above the amounts seized in 2007 and 2008.⁸ Moreover, methamphetamine laboratory seizures reported to the National Seizure System in the New Mexico HIDTA region decreased from 47 in 2008 to 28 in 2010. (See Figure 2 on page 4.)⁹ Further indicating the wide availability of the drug in the region are methamphetamine prices, which were relatively low and stable in 2010.¹⁰ Mexican methamphetamine prices in late 2010 generally ranged from \$1,600 to \$1,800 per ounce, but in areas reporting high availability, prices were even lower—\$1,000 per ounce in Albuquerque and Las Cruces and \$1,100 in Deming.¹¹

Higher methamphetamine availability in the region has resulted in increased abuse, particularly among younger users, and associated property and violent crime.¹² As such, 17 of the 25 law enforcement agencies in the region that responded to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National

a. For a general overview of the drug threat in the New Mexico HIDTA region, see Appendix A.

Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2011^b identify methamphetamine as the greatest drug threat in their jurisdictions. (See Figure A1 in Appendix A.) Increasing levels of methamphetamine abuse among younger users are indicated by data revealing that the percentage of adolescents in New Mexico who abuse methamphetamine exceeds that of the national average.¹³ According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (the most recent data available), more than 6 percent of youths surveyed in New Mexico indicated that they have used methamphetamine at least once, compared with the national rate of just over 4 percent (see Figure 5 on page 6). Local authorities in New Mexico HIDTA counties also cite methamphetamine in all forms as the drug most associated with both violent and property crimes in their jurisdictions.¹⁴ (See Table A1 in Appendix A.) For example, Santa Fe authorities indicate that mail theft by methamphetamine abusers to obtain drug money is common.¹⁵ Methamphetamine traffickers often employ violence in protecting distribution territories or compelling associates to pay their drug debts.¹⁶ The problem of methamphetamine-related violence is more acute on New Mexico's Indian lands.¹⁷ Tribal authorities on the Navajo Reservation estimate that 40 percent of violent crimes committed on reservation lands are related to methamphetamine abuse.¹⁸

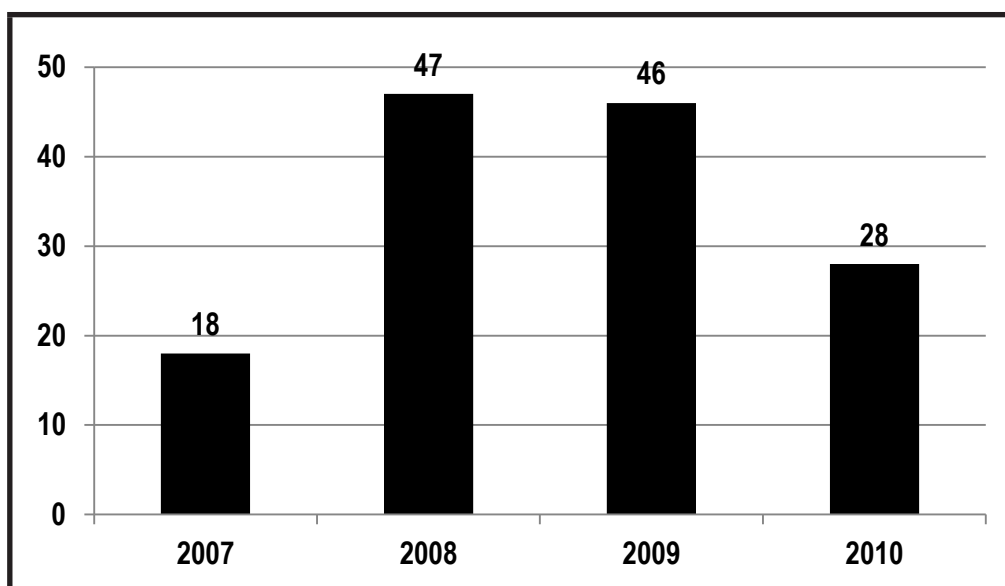
**Figure 1. Methamphetamine Seizures
in New Mexico, in Kilograms, 2007–2010**



Source: National Seizure System.

b. 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 HIDTA program as of February 24, 2011.

**Figure 2. Methamphetamine Laboratory Seizures
in New Mexico, 2007–2010**

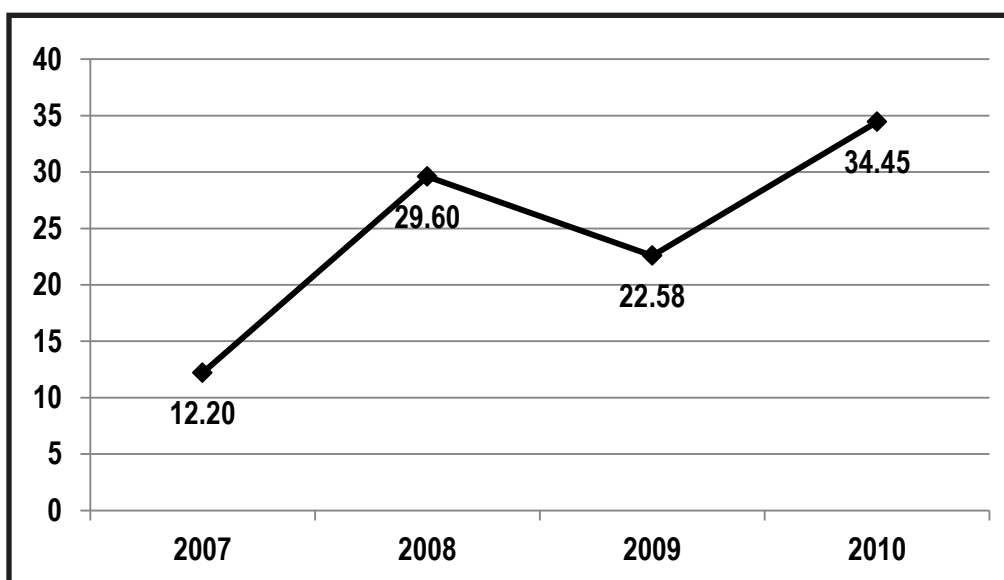


Source: National Seizure System.

Heroin is a persistent problem, particularly in northern New Mexico HIDTA counties. Availability of the drug is rising, corresponding with an upward trend in heroin treatment admissions among younger abusers, who are becoming increasingly involved in smuggling the drug into the region from Mexico.

Heroin, particularly Mexican black tar heroin, is commonly available and abused in northern counties of the New Mexico HIDTA region. Law enforcement reporting, increased heroin seizures, and low prices all indicate high availability of the drug.¹⁹ According to NDTS 2011 data, 20 of 25 law enforcement agency respondents in the region report high or moderate heroin availability.²⁰ DEA data indicate that heroin seizures statewide increased by more than 50 percent, from 22.58 kilograms in 2009 to 34.45 kilograms in 2010.²¹ (See Figure 3 on page 5.) More notably, heroin seizures by New Mexico HIDTA initiatives nearly tripled, from 46.3 kilograms seized in 2009 to 136.3 kilograms seized in 2010,²² further demonstrating high availability of the drug in the region. Moreover, a gram of heroin cost approximately \$100 throughout much of the HIDTA region in late 2010, but in areas reporting high or moderate heroin availability, such as Espanola and Santa Fe, prices as low as \$40 per gram were reported.²³

Figure 3. Heroin Seizures in New Mexico, 2007–2010, in Kilograms



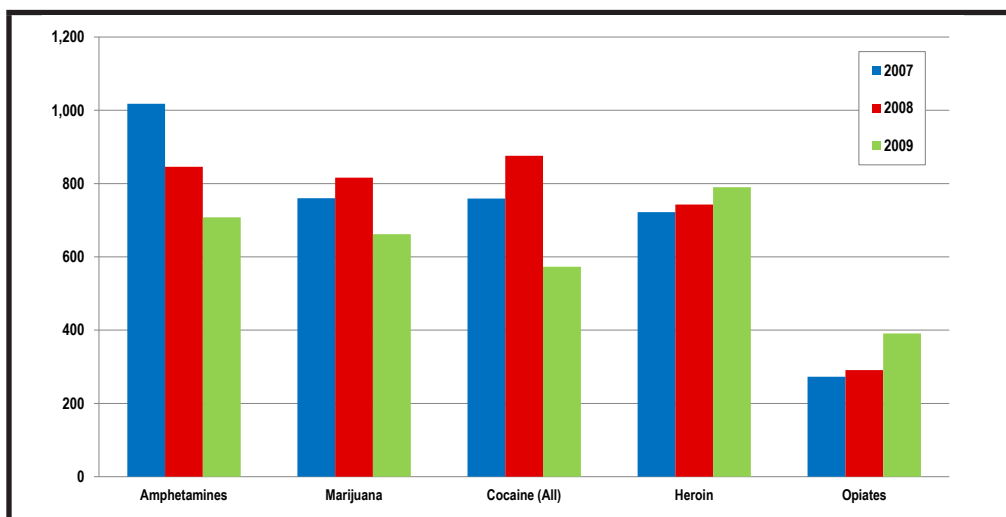
Source: National Seizure System.

Heroin abuse is widespread in the New Mexico HIDTA region but is an especially significant issue in the northern counties,²⁴ including Bernalillo and Rio Arriba, where heroin availability is the highest.²⁵ Historically, the highest per capita rates of heroin abuse and heroin-related deaths in the nation have occurred in Espanola, which is in Rio Arriba County,²⁶ where Mexican black tar heroin is widely available²⁷ and heroin abuse is a deeply entrenched problem that spans generations.²⁸ Consequently, statewide treatment data indicate an upward trend in heroin admissions from 2007 to 2009 (the most recent data available).²⁹ (See Figure 4 on page 6.) Of particular concern is the increase in the number of younger abusers in the region.³⁰ According to the Centers for Disease Control 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Study (the latest data available), the rate of heroin abuse among New Mexico youth was nearly twice the national average.³¹ (See Figure 5 on page 6.) Further, the New Mexico Department of Health reported that deaths from heroin overdoses among New Mexico residents under the age of 21 increased from less than 2 percent of the total heroin overdose deaths in the state in 2004 to 8 percent in 2009 (the latest data available).³²

The popularity of heroin among New Mexico high school students, particularly those who cross the border daily to attend school, has led some traffickers to recruit students to smuggle and distribute heroin and other drugs.³³ For example, Deming area law enforcement officers report that Mexican students who cross the border in buses to attend schools in New Mexico border towns are used by drug traffickers to smuggle drugs, including heroin, in their school bags.³⁴ Heroin distribution in and around schools in the region is a significant and growing concern for law enforcement and school officials. Albuquerque area law enforcement authorities report that in December 2010, they broke up a ring of heroin dealers operating near a northeast Albuquerque high school. Three young men in their teens and early twenties sold black tar heroin primarily to local high school students.³⁵ Similarly, in March 2011, Bernalillo County detectives disrupted another heroin distribution group operating within a school zone.³⁶

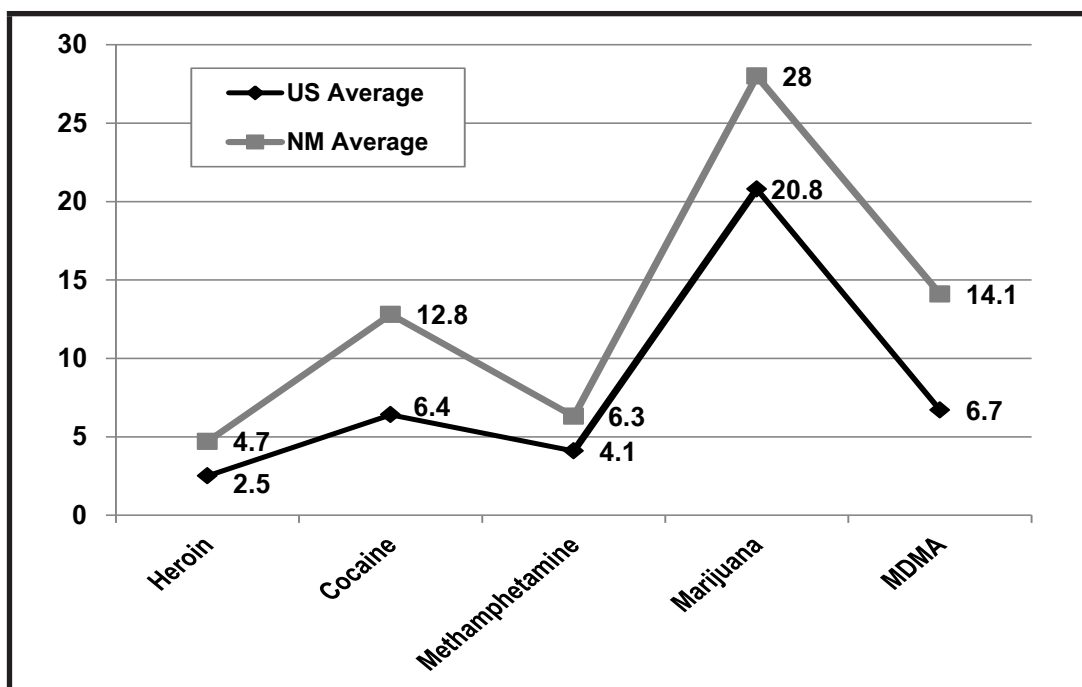
Local authorities indicate that many young heroin abusers start by abusing illegally obtained controlled prescription drugs (CPDs), primarily opioids such as oxycodone or hydrocodone, and later switch to heroin because it is more widely available and less costly.³⁷ For example, an oxycodone abuser typically requires 400 milligrams (five 80-mg tablets) of the drug daily to satisfy his or her addiction at a cost of \$400 to \$500 (\$80 to \$100 per tablet).³⁸ The same abuser can maintain an addiction with 2 grams of heroin for \$80 to \$200 per day.³⁹

Figure 4. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities in New Mexico, 2007–2009



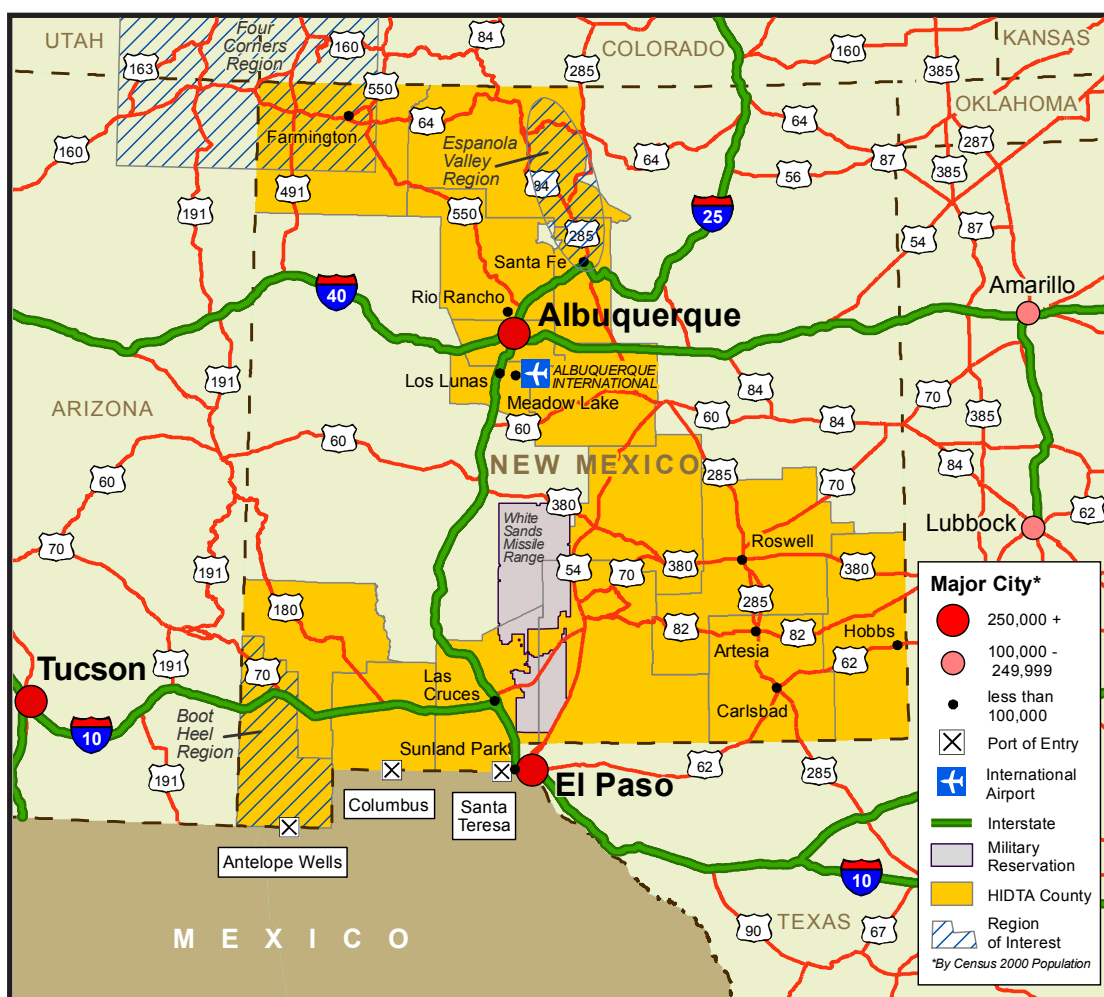
Source: Treatment Episode Data Set.

Figure 5. New Mexico and U.S. Average Responses, by Drug, to the Question: “Have you ever tried (drug specified) at least once?”



Source: Centers for Disease Control, Youth Risk Behavior Study, 2009.

Figure 6. New Mexico HIDTA Transportation Infrastructure



Mexican DTOs are increasingly using ultralights and other small aircraft to smuggle illicit drugs into the region from Mexico.

Mexican DTOs have increased their use of ultralight aircraft to carry illicit drugs, primarily marijuana, across the Mexico–New Mexico border.⁴⁰ In 2010, the Border Patrol Air and Marine Operations Center detected 65 suspected ultralights in the El Paso Sector, which includes the entire New Mexico–Mexico border, an increase from only two such detections reported in 2009.⁴¹ In June 2010, U.S. Customs and Border Protection received information regarding a possible ultralight incursion near Deming (NM). While agents were unable to locate the aircraft, they were able to stop and search a vehicle near the suspected landing/drop zone. Agents seized more than 200 pounds of marijuana from the vehicle.⁴² Mexican DTOs also use small or rural airports in locations such as Belen and Rio Rancho, as well as landing strips on private property, to smuggle drugs into the region aboard small aircraft.⁴³ (See text box on page 8.) Additionally, traffickers sometimes land aircraft on remote highways, as in Cuba (NM) near the Santa Fe National Forest, and offload smuggled drugs.⁴⁴

Use of Fixed-Wing Aircraft to Smuggle Drugs into New Mexico

Small aircraft are used to transport drugs from the New Mexico–Mexico border area to various locations within and beyond the New Mexico HIDTA region. In late April 2010, a pilot crashed a small fixed-wing airplane on a ranch near Tucumcari and abandoned the wreckage. Authorities investigating the crash site discovered more than 400 pounds of marijuana in and hidden near the wreckage. The pilot, who resided in Kentucky, had been traveling to an undetermined location. In late April 2011, a small plane crashed into Heron Lake in Rio Arriba County during poor weather. Among the debris found floating on the water were several bundles of cocaine. DEA El Paso Division information indicates that the pilot was from Idaho and may have been returning there with the drugs.

Source: New Mexico Department of Public Safety; Drug Enforcement Administration.

Outlook

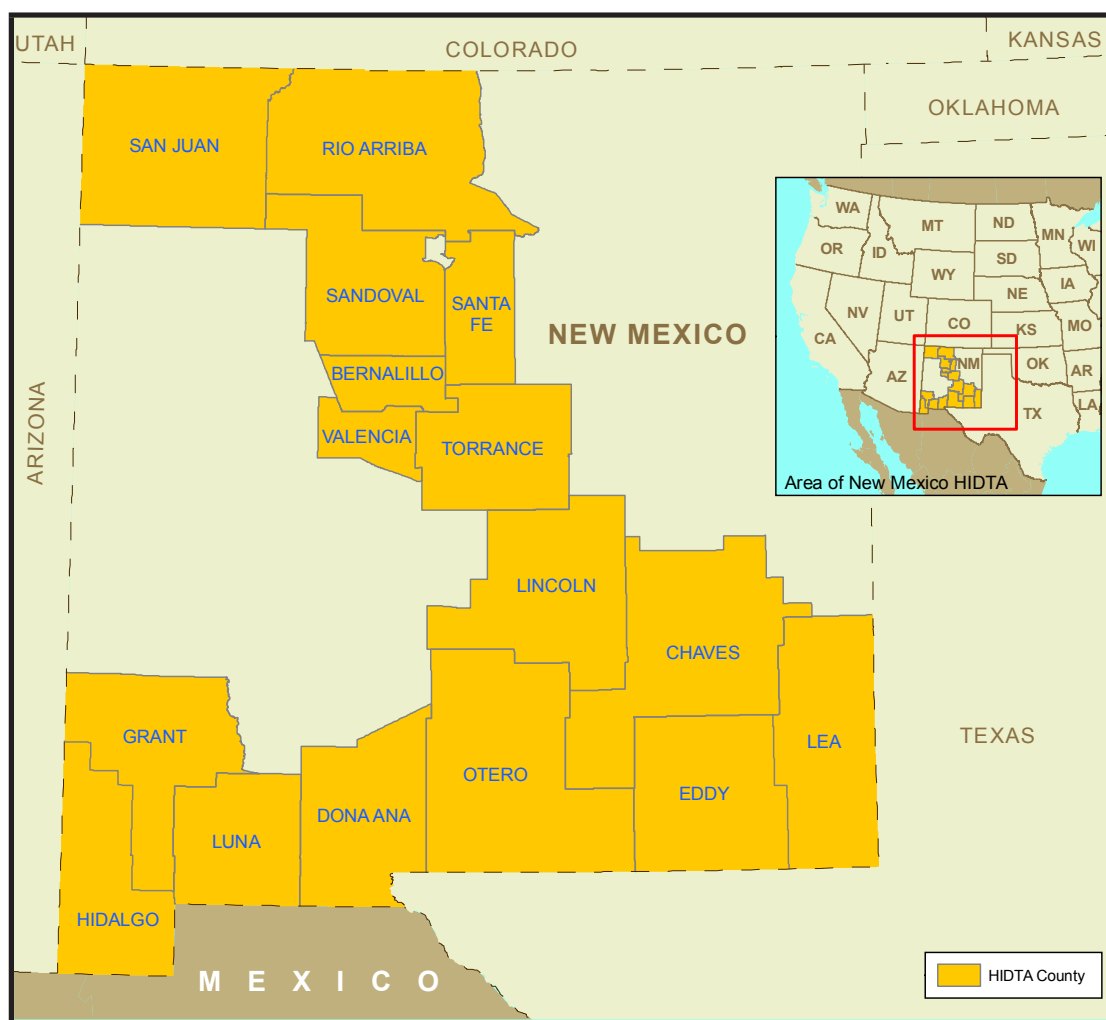
NDIC assesses with high confidence^c that increasing Mexican methamphetamine availability in the New Mexico HIDTA region will result in lower levels of local methamphetamine production and higher levels of abuse in the near term. NDIC assesses with high confidence that the threat posed by heroin abuse among younger people in the region will grow in the near term because of the wide availability and low cost of heroin. NDIC assesses with high confidence that Mexican DTOs will continue to exploit the highway infrastructure within the HIDTA region for the transshipment of drug loads from Mexico to markets throughout the nation. NDIC also assesses with high confidence that Mexican DTOs will increasingly exploit alternative methods to smuggle drugs into the New Mexico HIDTA region from Mexico, particularly the use of ultralight and small aircraft.

c. **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. New Mexico HIDTA Overview

The New Mexico HIDTA region comprises 16 counties—seven in northern New Mexico and nine in southern New Mexico—and has a total population of more than 1.6 million.⁴⁵ (See [Map A1.](#)) U.S. census data indicate that nearly half of the population resides in either Bernalillo County (615,099 residents) or Dona Ana County (193,888). Other significant population centers are the counties of Santa Fe (142,407), San Juan (126,473), and Sandoval (113,772). Albuquerque is New Mexico's largest city, with approximately 504,949 residents; other major cities in the region are Farmington, Las Cruces, Roswell, and Santa Fe.⁴⁶ The southern portion of the HIDTA is near the El Paso–Juárez, Chihuahua, borderplex, the largest international border community in the world, with a population of approximately 2.5 million.⁴⁷

Map A1. New Mexico HIDTA Counties



Southwestern New Mexico—specifically Hidalgo, Luna, and Dona Ana Counties—shares a 180-mile border with Mexico. Three ports of entry (POEs) are along the border: Antelope Wells, Columbus, and Santa Teresa. More than half the length of the New Mexico–Mexico border

consists of desolate public land and private ranches that contain innumerable footpaths, roads, and trails. Mexican DTOs exploit these factors and minimal law enforcement coverage (resulting from resource limitations) to smuggle drugs and other contraband (primarily aliens) into the United States and weapons and bulk cash into Mexico.⁴⁸

Mexican DTOs are exploiting the region for the transshipment of large quantities of illicit drugs from Mexico through the area to neighboring states. As a result, the flow of drugs through the region is a greater problem than cross-border drug smuggling.⁴⁹

The 180-mile border that the New Mexico HIDTA region shares with Mexico is used extensively by traffickers to smuggle heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana into the state.⁵⁰ However, the region is more significant as a transshipment zone for drugs smuggled into the United States.⁵¹ Mexican DTOs transport multihundred-kilogram quantities of illicit drugs from Arizona, California, west Texas, and Mexico through the area for distribution in markets throughout the country using Interstates 10, 25, and 40.⁵² (See Figure 6 on page 7.) For example, the Sinaloa and Juárez Cartels smuggle illicit drugs into the El Paso area through the New Mexico HIDTA counties to supply distributors in markets such as Denver and Chicago, as well as cartel affiliates in Florida drug markets.⁵³ Additionally, portions of the illicit drugs available in the HIDTA counties arrive from other locations along the Southwest Border and are “dropped off” in the HIDTA region en route to other areas.⁵⁴ For instance, Mexican DTOs smuggle methamphetamine from Ascencion, Chihuahua, Mexico, through Douglas and Tucson (AZ) and transport it along I-10 to Las Cruces,⁵⁵ with final destinations farther east, including the Midland-Odessa (TX) area.⁵⁶

According to the New Mexico HIDTA, both the Juárez Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel operate in the area, but neither controls the POEs into New Mexico.⁵⁷ Law enforcement reporting indicates that the sources of drugs entering and passing through the HIDTA region shifts between the cartels. For example, in the past, backpackers carrying marijuana in the Columbus area originated in the Juárez area, indicating that the Juárez Cartel was dominating the marijuana smuggling in the vicinity.⁵⁸ More recently, the backpackers are coming from areas controlled by the Sinaloa Cartel.⁵⁹ The La Familia Michoacana (LFM) Mexican DTO also operates in the HIDTA region, particularly in the central part of the region,⁶⁰ however, LFM maintains its own distribution network and supplies methamphetamine directly to its own street-level dealers.⁶¹

Street gangs associated with Mexican DTOs distribute wholesale and retail quantities of illicit drugs within the HIDTA region.⁶² Most are Hispanic street or prison gangs, including Barrio Azteca, which primarily distributes black tar heroin in the Sunland Park and Anthony (NM) areas near the El Paso–Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, borderplex.⁶³ Other gangs active in drug distribution include the New Mexican Syndicate (a local associate of the Mexican Mafia), Los Padillas, Juaritos Maravilla, and various local Sureños sets.⁶⁴ Several African American gangs distribute drugs, particularly crack cocaine, within the HIDTA region as well, mainly in the Hobbs area.⁶⁵

Methamphetamine is the greatest drug threat in the New Mexico HIDTA region, largely because of crimes associated with the distribution and abuse of the drug.⁶⁶ According to NDTs 2011 data, 17 of the 25 responding law enforcement agencies within the HIDTA counties report that methamphetamine is the drug most associated with violent crime, and 15 of 25 respondents report the same for property crime. (See Table A1 in Appendix A.) While treatment admissions for

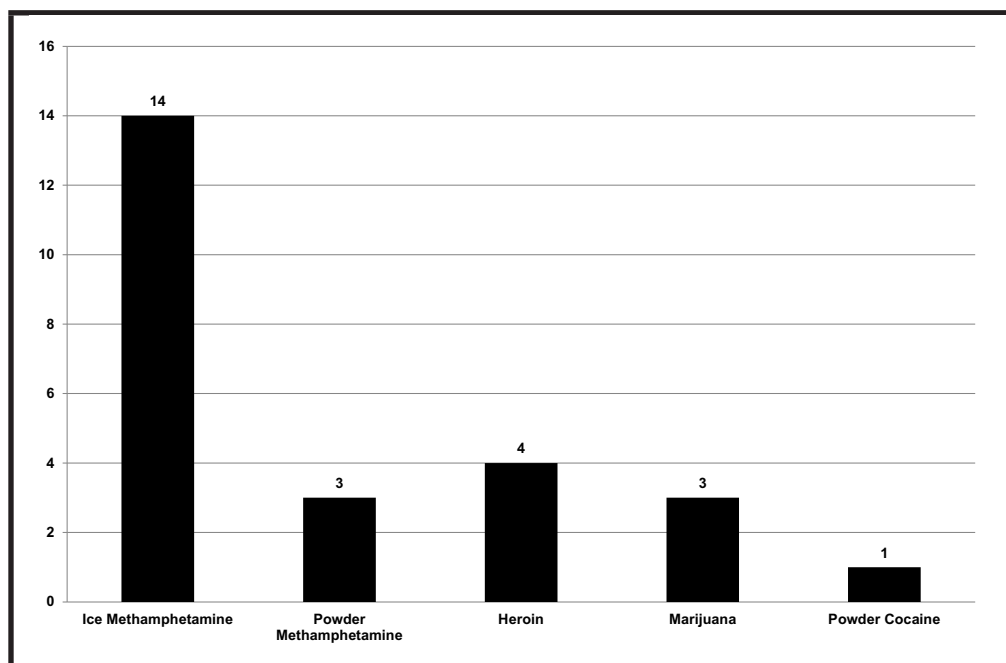
cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine abuse have declined, according to Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) figures, amphetamine admissions decreased at a lesser rate than admissions for other drugs and were second only to those for heroin in 2009 (the latest available data). (See Figure 4 on page 6.)

Table A1. Drug Most Associated with Violent or Property Crime in the New Mexico HIDTA Region as Reported by State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2011

Drug	Violent Crime	Property Crime
Methamphetamine (all forms)	17	15
Cocaine (all forms)	4	2
Heroin	2	6
Marijuana	1	0
CPDs	0	1
NA	1	1
Total	25	25

Source: National Drug Threat Survey, 2011.
NA—Not available

Figure A1. Greatest Drug Threat in the New Mexico HIDTA Region as Reported by State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies, 2011



Source: National Drug Threat Survey 2011.

Heroin abuse is widespread in the New Mexico HIDTA region but is an especially significant issue in the northern counties,⁶⁷ including Bernalillo and Rio Arriba, where heroin availability is the highest.⁶⁸ Of particular concern is an increase in the number of younger abusers in the region.⁶⁹ (See [heroin discussion on page 5.](#)) Local authorities indicate that many heroin abusers commit property crimes, such as theft or shoplifting, in order to fund their drug habits.⁷⁰

The abuse of CPDs, particularly opioid painkillers such as hydrocodone and oxycodone, is an increasing problem within the New Mexico HIDTA region.⁷¹ Statewide treatment admissions for the abuse of opiates other than heroin have increased since 2007, from 273 admissions to 391 in 2009.⁷² (See [Figure 4 on page 6.](#)) Often, individuals obtain CPDs through thefts, including those from a pharmacy or a parent's prescription medications;⁷³ prescription fraud, such as the use of stolen prescription pads;⁷⁴ or calling in fraudulent orders to pharmacies using a valid physicians' DEA license number without the knowledge of the physician.⁷⁵ CPDs are also gaining popularity among high school students, some of whom participate in "trail mix parties," where attendees combine available pills in a bowl and ingest handfuls at a time.⁷⁶ CPD abuse is often linked to later heroin use among youth.⁷⁷

Overall, powder cocaine supply and prices within the New Mexico HIDTA region remained steady over the past year, with increased seizure amounts indicating a greater amount of the drug entering the area.⁷⁸ TEDS data point to a decrease in cocaine abuse treatment admissions from 2008 (876) to 2009 (573)—the latest available data. Law enforcement officials in several areas in the region, such as Deming and Albuquerque, report increased crack cocaine availability.⁷⁹

Endnotes

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58. Regional Interagency Drug Task Force, Las Cruces, interview by NDIC IA, March 8, 2011.
59. ICE, Las Cruces, interview by NDIC IA, March 8, 2011.
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Executive Office of the President
 Office of National Drug Control Policy
 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
 Southwest Border
 Investigative Support Center
 New Mexico High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
 Regional Interagency Drug Task Force
 Rio Grande Valley Task Force
U.S. Department of Commerce
 U.S. Census Bureau
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
 U.S. Customs and Border Protection
 Border Patrol Field Intelligence Center
 Office of the Secretariat
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 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
U.S. Department of Justice
 Drug Enforcement Administration
 Albuquerque Field Division
 El Paso Intelligence Center
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 Bureau of Indian Affairs
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Other

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KRQE-TV
New Mexico Independent
Santa Fe New Mexican
The Taos News

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