



U.S. Department of Justice  
National Drug Intelligence Center



# Northern California 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 Northern California 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 Northern California 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. The HIDTA region continues to be a national- and regional-level production and distribution center for ice methamphetamine and marijuana. However, the threat posed by methamphetamine has been compounded by well-organized pseudoephedrine smurfing rings, a growing number of methamphetamine conversion laboratories, and widespread trafficking and abuse of the drug. Additionally, local criminals are exploiting medical marijuana laws by increasing their indoor cannabis cultivation efforts in the region. The distribution and abuse of cocaine, heroin, and other dangerous drugs (ODDs) are secondary drug threats that continue to be persistent problems in the region. In addition, Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) use the region as a primary corridor for illicit drugs moving between Mexico and Canada.

Key issues identified in the Northern California HIDTA region include the following:

- Mexican DTOs maintain unrivaled dominance over wholesale drug distribution in the Northern California HIDTA region. Their deeply entrenched, well-organized, and extensive networks enable them to supply illicit drug markets in the region and throughout much of the country.
- Widespread methamphetamine trafficking and abuse, particularly of ice methamphetamine, remains a problem so pervasive that methamphetamine continues to pose the greatest drug threat to the region.
- Methamphetamine production continues at high levels in the region—largely facilitated by well-organized pseudoephedrine smurfing rings and a growing number of methamphetamine conversion laboratories.
- Outdoor cannabis cultivation continues at high levels in the region at grow sites principally operated by Mexican DTOs. The propensity of these DTOs for violence while protecting their grow sites poses a significant threat to public safety and law enforcement personnel.
- High-potency marijuana continues to be produced at illicit indoor grow sites in the region by various DTOs, criminal groups, and independent dealers exploiting California's state medical marijuana laws.

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

**Mexican DTOs maintain unrivaled dominance over wholesale drug distribution in the Northern California HIDTA region. Their deeply entrenched, well-organized, and extensive networks enable them to supply illicit drug markets in the region and throughout much of the country.**

Mexican DTOs continue to pose the greatest organizational drug threat to the Northern California region.<sup>1</sup> They supply most of the methamphetamine (particularly ice methamphetamine), cocaine, and Mexican black tar heroin available in the area and operate the majority of the methamphetamine laboratories and outdoor cannabis cultivation sites located within the region.<sup>2</sup> (See text box on page 3.) In fact, some Mexican DTOs operating in the region use revenues derived from their outdoor cannabis cultivation to fund domestic methamphetamine production operations in northern and central California.<sup>3</sup> Mexican DTOs are deeply entrenched, well organized, and extensively connected through multigenerational family networks that operate in both Mexico and California as well as in drug markets throughout the United States.<sup>4</sup> Leaders within these family networks are based primarily in Redwood City, East Palo Alto, and San Jose (CA).<sup>5</sup>

Mexican DTOs typically smuggle multipound loads of ice methamphetamine, cocaine, and Mexican black tar heroin from Mexico through U.S. ports of entry (POEs) in Calexico, San Ysidro, and Otay Mesa (CA) and then transport the drugs to northern California.<sup>6</sup> They generally bring illicit drugs into the region in private and commercial vehicles and store them at stash sites located in private residences, warehouses, and storage facilities both within the region and in southern California.<sup>7</sup> Mexican DTOs subsequently distribute the drugs to major drug markets within the Northern California HIDTA region as well as to markets in the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, Hawaii, Canada, and areas along the East Coast.<sup>8</sup>

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



### 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 was 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 in Sacramento as well as 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 for the investigation 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>9</sup>

**Figure 1. Ice Methamphetamine Conversion Laboratory Seized During Operation Bread Basket**



Source: California Department of Justice, Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement, San Jose Regional Office; Central Valley and Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas.

**Widespread methamphetamine trafficking and abuse, particularly of ice methamphetamine, remains a problem so pervasive that methamphetamine continues to pose the greatest drug threat to the region.**

Law enforcement reporting and seizure, price, and treatment data indicate high levels of methamphetamine trafficking and abuse, particularly of ice methamphetamine, in the Northern California HIDTA region.<sup>10</sup> During numerous interviews in early 2011, law enforcement officials in the region repeatedly raised concerns about high and increasing levels of methamphetamine trafficking and abuse.<sup>11</sup> Their concerns are supported by National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2011<sup>b</sup> data—29 of the 41 law enforcement agency respondents in the Northern California HIDTA region report that ice methamphetamine is available at high or moderate levels in their jurisdictions.<sup>12</sup> (See text box on page 5.) Ice methamphetamine seizures increased in the Northern California HIDTA region in 2010, evidencing high and rising levels of availability. Northern California HIDTA officials seized more than 806 kilograms of ice methamphetamine in 2010, a significant increase from 97 kilograms seized in 2009.<sup>13</sup> In fact, more methamphetamine was seized in 2010 by Northern California HIDTA initiatives than any other illicit drug except marijuana. (See Table 1.) Pricing data also suggest widespread availability of the drug. The average wholesale-level price for ice methamphetamine in the region remained relatively stable from 2009 (\$15,000 to \$22,000 per pound) through 2010 (\$17,500 to \$20,000 per pound).<sup>14</sup> High levels of methamphetamine trafficking contribute to high levels of abuse, as indicated by drug treatment data.<sup>15</sup> According to the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, methamphetamine was identified as the primary substance of abuse in treatment admissions in the Northern California HIDTA region more often than any other drug from 2006 through 2010.<sup>16</sup> (See Table B1 in Appendix B.)

**Table 1. Drug Seizures by the Northern California HIDTA, in Kilograms, 2010**

Drugs Seized	Amount Seized (in Kilograms)
Marijuana	797.064
Marijuana Plants* (Outdoors)	33,070.746 (estimated 73,004 plants)
Marijuana Plants* (Indoors)	27,281.540 (estimated 60,224 plants)
Cocaine (Powder)	89.302
Cocaine (Crack)	2.394
Methamphetamine (Powder)	23.582
Methamphetamine (Ice)	806.572
Heroin	8.203

Source: Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, March 2010.

\*The Office of National Drug Control Policy estimates that each seized marijuana plant equals 0.454 kilograms of marijuana.

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 (ONDCP) HIDTA program as of March 4, 2011.

### **Ramifications of Methamphetamine Chemical Restrictions in Mexico**

Most of the methamphetamine, both ice and powder, available in the Northern California HIDTA region is supplied by Mexican DTOs that obtain the drug from production operations in Mexico. Consequently, pseudoephedrine and ephedrine import restrictions in Mexico that resulted in decreased Mexican methamphetamine production in 2007 and 2008 led to decreased methamphetamine availability in the Northern California HIDTA region during that period. However, the National Methamphetamine and Pharmaceuticals Initiative (NMPI) reports that the supply of methamphetamine from production operations in Mexico has since rebounded.<sup>17</sup> By mid to late 2008, Mexican DTOs had adapted their production operations in Mexico by finding new sources of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine precursors and increasing their use of non-ephedrine-based production methods.<sup>18</sup> The limited access to ephedrine and pseudoephedrine caused some production operations to switch to non-ephedrine-based methods such as the phenyl-2-propanone (P2P) method, which involves the use of phenylacetic acid and results in less potent d,l-methamphetamine.<sup>19</sup>

Based on methamphetamine seizures at the Southwest Border, NMPI officials estimate that approximately 70 percent of the methamphetamine transported into the United States from Mexico is d,l-methamphetamine, with the other 30 percent being the more potent d-methamphetamine.<sup>20</sup> As a result, some Mexican DTOs in the region have begun using signature marketing techniques to distinguish d-methamphetamine from lower-potency d,l-methamphetamine, such as coloring the higher-potency drug blue.<sup>21</sup> In 2010, HIDTA officials reported the availability of limited quantities of blue-colored ice methamphetamine in the Northern and Central Valley areas of California.<sup>22</sup> Local methamphetamine distributors in the South Bay Area of San Francisco are also reportedly coloring methamphetamine blue, most likely to capitalize on this marketing strategy.<sup>23</sup>

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Sources: Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area; National Methamphetamine and Pharmaceuticals Initiative.

Because of the consistently high levels of methamphetamine trafficking and abuse in the Northern California HIDTA region, methamphetamine remains the greatest drug threat to the area.<sup>24</sup> NDTs 2011 data support this contention, revealing that 29 of the 41 law enforcement agency respondents in the Northern California HIDTA region identify methamphetamine (ice and powder) as the greatest drug threat in their jurisdictions. These respondents also indicate that methamphetamine is the drug most associated with violent crime and property crime perpetrated in their areas.<sup>25</sup> (See Table B2 in Appendix B.)

**Methamphetamine production continues unabated in the region—largely facilitated by well-organized pseudoephedrine smurfing rings and a growing number of methamphetamine conversion laboratories.**

Methamphetamine laboratory seizure data and law enforcement reporting indicate that methamphetamine production continues to be a significant problem in the region.<sup>26</sup> According to the Northern California HIDTA, 22 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in 2010, a slight increase from the 19 laboratories seized in 2009.<sup>27</sup> (See Table B3 in Appendix B.) National Seizure System (NSS) data also indicate continued methamphetamine production in the region—3 sites containing chemicals, glass, and equipment; 2 methamphetamine dumpsites; 7 ice conversion laboratories, and 12 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in 2010, a slight overall increase from 2009.<sup>c, 28</sup> (See Table B4 in Appendix B.) Most of the laboratories seized in the region had production capacities of less than 2 pounds of methamphetamine per production cycle.<sup>29</sup>

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c. Northern California HIDTA officials report that HIDTA methamphetamine laboratory seizure data and NSS methamphetamine laboratory seizure data differ because of a time lag in NSS reporting.

(See Table B3 in Appendix B.) Mexican DTOs operate most of the methamphetamine laboratories in the region.<sup>30</sup> In addition, some Mexican DTOs and criminal groups based in the Northern California HIDTA region operate large-scale methamphetamine laboratories in the adjacent Central Valley HIDTA region.<sup>31</sup> The methamphetamine produced at laboratories in both regions is distributed in California as well as supplied to distribution cells operating throughout the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Methamphetamine laboratory operators in the region are supplied with precursor chemicals obtained through well-organized pseudoephedrine smurfing operations that circumvent point-of-sale control measures.<sup>d, 33</sup> Many of these smurfing operations extend beyond northern California into central and southern California, Arizona, and Nevada.<sup>34</sup> In fact, smurfing has become so profitable in the region and other parts of California that some drug organizations have shifted their operations from drug trafficking to pseudoephedrine pill smurfing.<sup>35</sup> Unlike in other parts of the country, where many smurfers use the pseudoephedrine they buy to make methamphetamine themselves, many of the more organized smurfing rings in California buy the pills for the substantial profit-earning potential on the black market.<sup>36</sup> A typical smurfing cell in California employs approximately 30 smurfers to purchase pills from at least 20 stores each day.<sup>37</sup> Collectively, those 30 smurfers are able to amass enough pseudoephedrine in a single day to make 4 pounds of methamphetamine.<sup>38</sup> Many individuals, including the homeless, are lured into the smurfing business for less than \$100 a day, for food, or for alcohol.<sup>39</sup>

Methamphetamine conversion laboratories, while constituting only a small portion of the methamphetamine laboratories seized over the past 5 years in the Northern California HIDTA region, have increased in number.<sup>40</sup> NSS data indicate that seven methamphetamine conversion laboratories were seized in 2010, an increase from the two seized in 2009.<sup>41</sup> (See Table B4 in Appendix B.) Law enforcement officials report that Mexican DTOs operate all of the methamphetamine conversion laboratories in the region.<sup>42</sup> To supply these laboratories, they transport powder or liquid methamphetamine<sup>e</sup> from Mexico through southern California to the Northern California HIDTA region.<sup>43</sup> Once in the region, the powder methamphetamine is dissolved in an acetone solution and dried into ice crystals,<sup>44</sup> while the liquid methamphetamine undergoes a chemical process through which the methamphetamine is extracted from the liquid and converted into methamphetamine crystals.<sup>45</sup> Conversion laboratories are capable of producing large quantities of ice methamphetamine, depending on the amount of powder or liquid methamphetamine available.<sup>46</sup>

**Outdoor cannabis cultivation continues at high levels in the region at grow sites principally operated by Mexican DTOs.<sup>47</sup> The propensity of these DTOs for violence while protecting their grow sites poses a significant threat to public safety and law enforcement personnel.**

California, including the Northern California HIDTA region, remains one of the most significant outdoor cannabis cultivation areas in the United States.<sup>48</sup> Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) data for 2010 indicate that 90 percent (nearly 8.9 million) of the 9,866,766 million outdoor cannabis plants eradicated in the United States were eradicated in only

d. In 2005, the U.S. Government passed the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act, which placed point-of-sale restrictions on retail pseudoephedrine sales.

e. Liquid methamphetamine is powder methamphetamine that has been dissolved in fuel, water, windshield washer fluid, or other liquid to disguise it. The drug returns to a usable powder form once the liquid evaporates.

seven states—California, Hawaii, Kentucky, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia (commonly referred to as the Marijuana Seven, or M7, states).<sup>49</sup> DCE/SP data further indicate that 7,204,355 plants were eradicated from outdoor grow sites in California alone.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the Northern California HIDTA region accounted for 14 percent (1,018,963) of the plants eradicated in the state that year.<sup>51</sup> (See Table B5 in Appendix B.) The marijuana produced from the cannabis cultivated in the Northern California HIDTA region is distributed within the region as well as to markets in the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, Hawaii, Canada, and areas along the East Coast.<sup>52</sup>

Mexican DTOs conduct most of the outdoor cannabis cultivation operations in the Northern California HIDTA region.<sup>53</sup> These DTOs, primarily from Michoacán, Mexico, commonly employ illegal aliens to tend the grow sites, harvest the cannabis, and protect the sites from intruders.<sup>54</sup> While most of these individuals are paid to work at the grow sites, some are coerced into working in exchange for passage into the United States and for the protection of their families living in Mexico.<sup>55</sup> Most outdoor grow sites in the region are located on public lands, such as the Mendocino National Forest in Lake and Mendocino Counties.<sup>56</sup> Law enforcement officers report that Lake, Monterey, Santa Clara, and Sonoma Counties are experiencing increased outdoor cannabis cultivation activity by Mexican DTOs.<sup>57</sup> County-level cannabis eradication data, however, are unavailable for inclusion in this report.<sup>58</sup>

Cannabis cultivation-related violence continues to rise in the region, particularly on public lands.<sup>59</sup> The prevalence of outdoor grow sites on accessible public lands has resulted in confrontations between armed site caretakers and hikers, hunters, and campers who inadvertently encounter them.<sup>60</sup> During numerous interviews in early 2011, law enforcement officers in the region repeatedly stated that crop tenders frequently arm themselves with high-caliber assault weapons, sniper rifles, and hunting rifles to protect their grow sites, posing a significant threat to the public and law enforcement personnel.<sup>61</sup> For example, during the summer 2010 cannabis eradication season, law enforcement officers reported experiencing an unprecedented number of violent confrontations with cannabis cultivators, particularly Mexican growers.<sup>62</sup> In fact, from June 2010 through August 2010, law enforcement officials working in conjunction with DEA's DCE/SP reportedly experienced more armed encounters with Mexican nationals protecting their grow sites than in any other eradication season to date; however, the actual number of armed encounters is not routinely captured by personnel.<sup>63</sup> To illustrate, armed confrontations at grow sites in Kern, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, and Santa Clara Counties resulted in the deaths of six armed Mexican nationals after they aimed or fired their weapons at law enforcement officers.<sup>64</sup> (See text box on page 8.)



### **Law Enforcement Encounters With Armed Individuals at Cannabis Grow Sites in North and Central California**

- **June 2010:** A bullet from a firearm discharged by an unidentified individual struck the rear truck window of a Mendocino County Sheriff's Deputy patrol vehicle that was entering an outdoor grow site.
- **June 2010:** Napa County Special Investigations Bureau officers encountered two armed individuals at an outdoor grow site on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) public lands in Napa County.
- **July 2010:** Officers with the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Office encountered an armed individual at an outdoor grow site located on private property in Santa Clara County (52,000-acre ranchland). The individual was armed with what appeared to be a rifle (but was later determined to be a 0.177-caliber high-powered pellet gun).
- **July 2010:** Officers with the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) encountered two armed individuals at an outdoor grow site on U.S. Forest Service lands in Mendocino County.
- **August 2010:** Officers with the Lake County Sheriff's Office (LCSO) encountered an armed individual at an outdoor grow site located on BLM lands in Lake County.
- **August 2010:** Officers with the MCSO encountered multiple individuals at an outdoor grow site located on private property in Mendocino County (550 acres). One individual had a semi-automatic handgun and two additional rifles on or near him. Law enforcement officers also encountered three armed individuals at another, related grow site on the same property.
- **August 2010:** Officers with the Kern County Sheriff's Office encountered five individuals at an outdoor grow site on public lands. One of the individuals at the grow site picked up a rifle and aimed it at the officers.
- **September 2010:** Officers with the MCSO engaged in an armed altercation with an individual who was wanted in connection with outdoor cannabis grow-related robberies and other violent acts.

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Source: Drug Enforcement Administration San Francisco Division; Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

### **High-potency marijuana continues to be produced at illicit indoor grow sites in the region by various DTOs, criminal groups, and independent dealers exploiting California's state medical marijuana laws.**

High-potency marijuana is produced at indoor grow sites located throughout the region.<sup>65</sup> NDTs 2011 data reveal that 33 of the 41 law enforcement agency respondents in the Northern California HIDTA region indicate that cannabis is grown indoors in their jurisdictions.<sup>66</sup> The number of cannabis plants eradicated from indoor grow sites in the region increased from 2009 (39,316 plants) through 2010 (47,890 plants).<sup>67</sup> (See Table B5 in Appendix B.) DTOs and criminal groups typically establish illicit indoor grow sites in residential homes, apartments, and warehouses.<sup>68</sup> Indoor cannabis cultivators use complex lighting and irrigation systems as well as hydroponic technology or soil mediums.<sup>69</sup> Indoor cannabis cultivators often bypass meters and

modify electrical circuitry, creating hazardous conditions that contribute to electrical shock or fire.<sup>70</sup> Additional hazards exist as indoor cultivators use booby traps and weapons to protect their grow sites from home invasions by other criminals and eradication by law enforcement.<sup>71</sup> The controlled environment of indoor grow sites enables cultivators to derive greater profits from a year-round growing cycle, which can yield a higher-potency crop every 90 days.<sup>72</sup> High-potency marijuana produced at indoor grow sites in the region is distributed within the region and to markets in the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, Hawaii, Canada, and areas along the East Coast.<sup>73</sup>

Illicit indoor grow sites are operated primarily by Caucasian criminal groups and independent dealers and Asian DTOs.<sup>74</sup> Caucasian criminal groups and independent dealers operate the majority of illicit indoor grow sites in the region.<sup>75</sup> Asian DTOs (particularly Chinese and Vietnamese traffickers with ties to Canada) are also involved in indoor grow operations.<sup>76</sup> The command-and-control elements of many Asian DTOs distance themselves from U.S. law enforcement by running their operations from Canada.<sup>77</sup> Asian DTO-operated grow sites are extensive and typically involve multiple homes located in newer communities within the region.<sup>78</sup> Many growers exploit California's state medical marijuana laws to conduct illegal grow operations for profit.<sup>79</sup> Law enforcement officers in the region report that California Proposition 215 is often exploited by seemingly legitimate medical marijuana growers and medical marijuana dispensaries.<sup>80</sup> Northern California HIDTA officials report that these seemingly legitimate growers—at indoor and outdoor grow sites—run their operations for profit and 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>81</sup> (See text box.)

#### California Proposition 215

California Proposition 215 (California Compassionate Use Act of 1996, Health and Safety Code §11362.5) permits patients and primary caregivers to possess or cultivate cannabis for medical treatment based on a physician's recommendation, exempting them from state criminal laws that otherwise prohibit possession or cultivation of marijuana. Legal protections are also provided to physicians who recommend the use of marijuana for medical treatment. Under Proposition 215, no prescription is needed to obtain marijuana for medicinal use. Patients may possess 8 ounces and 6 mature or 12 immature cannabis plants; possession of additional amounts of marijuana is permitted under this plan, based on medical necessity.

In November 2008, the California Supreme Court further defined the role of a primary caregiver.<sup>82</sup> The Supreme Court opined that an individual whose caregiving consists principally of supplying marijuana does not qualify as a primary caregiver under Proposition 215. To qualify as a primary caregiver, an individual must render assistance to provide daily life necessities.

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Sources: California Secretary of State; Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

## Outlook

NDIC assesses with high confidence<sup>f</sup> that Mexican DTOs will maintain their dominance over ice methamphetamine, cocaine, and Mexican black tar heroin trafficking in the Northern California HIDTA region for the foreseeable future. No other trafficking group operating in the region has the sources of supply or organizational structure to challenge them.

NDIC assesses with high confidence that ice methamphetamine will remain the greatest drug threat to the region in the near term. Demand for the drug is high, a situation that is not expected to change. Ice methamphetamine availability will likely increase as Mexican DTOs establish more large-capacity methamphetamine conversion laboratories capable of producing hundreds of pounds of ice methamphetamine and as they increase their use of organized pseudoephedrine smurfing rings to obtain the necessary precursor chemicals to produce the drug.

NDIC assesses with high confidence that the Northern California HIDTA region will remain one of the most significant cannabis cultivation and marijuana production areas in the nation. The demand for high-potency marijuana is strong, and there are no indications that this situation will change over the next year. Indoor cannabis cultivators, including many illegal cultivators who claim protection under the state's medical marijuana law, will likely expand their operations, as will Asian DTOs.

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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. Northern California HIDTA Overview

Map A1. Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



The Northern California HIDTA region consists of 10 counties in the San Francisco Bay area—Alameda, Contra Costa, Lake, Marin, Monterey, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Sonoma.<sup>83</sup> (See Map A1 in Appendix A.) The region encompasses major metropolitan areas, including Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose. The region's transportation infrastructure provides direct access to primary drug source areas in Asia, Canada, Europe, and Mexico. This facilitates drug smuggling into the United States for subsequent distribution within the region and to primary drug markets in the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, Hawaii, and Canada and on the East Coast, as well as bulk cash smuggling back to source areas.

The Northern California HIDTA region has a highly developed transportation infrastructure composed of roadways, airports, and seaports that link the area to drug source and transit areas as well as to other domestic drug markets.<sup>84</sup> U.S. Highway 101, a north-south corridor, provides direct access to the region from Mexico and Canada. In addition, Interstate 80, a major east-west corridor, connects San Francisco to New York City. The San Francisco International Airport is the largest airport in the Bay Area; approximately 34 million passengers transited the airport in 2010.<sup>85</sup> Other major international airports in the region are the Oakland International Airport (including the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Air Mail Center) and San Jose International Airport. The CBP Air Mail Center is one of only nine international mail branches in the country (and one of two in the western United States). Large shipments of controlled substances including controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) such as anorectics (phentermine and sibutramine) and benzodiazepines, heroin tablets, khat, methamphetamine (shabu),<sup>g</sup> MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy), and opium have been seized by officials at the CBP Air Mail Center.<sup>86</sup> Traffickers frequently transport illicit drugs and drug proceeds into and through the HIDTA region through package delivery services and the mail system, particularly from foreign sources that include China, the Philippines, and Thailand.<sup>87</sup> The Port of Oakland is the fourth-busiest container port in the United States. It processed more than 12.3 million metric tons of cargo in 2009.<sup>88</sup> The Port of San Francisco processed more than 93 metric tons of cargo and more than 172,000 passengers in 2009.<sup>89</sup> A lack of actionable information and resources makes detection and interdiction efforts at port facilities extremely challenging for CBP and other law enforcement officials. As a result, the extent of drug trafficking through the ports is considered an intelligence gap.

While Mexican DTOs are the dominant wholesale drug distributors, members of street gangs, prison gangs, and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) are the primary midlevel and retail-level drug distributors in the Northern California HIDTA region.<sup>90</sup> Hispanic street gangs, primarily affiliates of the Sureños and Norteños gangs, distribute methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin.<sup>91</sup> African American street gang members, primarily affiliates of Bloods and Crips, distribute crack cocaine and marijuana at the retail level.<sup>92</sup> Asian street gangs, such as Wah Ching and Asian Boyz, are involved in retail-level MDMA and marijuana distribution.<sup>93</sup> Prison gangs such as Border Brothers and Kumi Nation are involved in the distribution of methamphetamine, crack cocaine, and marijuana.<sup>94</sup> Members of OMGs, most notably Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, are active in the midlevel and retail-level distribution of powder cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana.<sup>95</sup> Gang members are often extremely violent as they establish and maintain control of their drug trafficking activities.<sup>96</sup> For example, in January 2011, the former leader of a San Francisco branch of the MS 13 street gang (also known as La Mara Salvatrucha) pleaded guilty

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g. Shabu is a common street name for methamphetamine from the Philippines.

to charges of racketeering, murder conspiracy, and gun use based on a grand jury indictment filed in U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, against 29 alleged gang members.<sup>97</sup> The San Francisco branch of MS 13, known as 20th Street, had been operating primarily in the Mission and Tenderloin districts of San Francisco and was involved in methamphetamine and cocaine trafficking as well as murder, attempted murder, assault, robbery, extortion, vehicle theft, weapons violations, and witness intimidation.<sup>98</sup>

Mexican and Asian DTOs are the primary drug money launderers operating in the Northern California HIDTA region.<sup>99</sup> These DTOs employ a variety of methods to move and launder millions of dollars in illicit drug proceeds.<sup>100</sup> Mexican traffickers transport bulk cash from the region to Mexico primarily in private and commercial vehicles.<sup>101</sup> Asian traffickers smuggle bulk currency to Canada in private and commercial vehicles or to Asian countries using commercial aircraft, maritime conveyances, and package delivery services.<sup>102</sup> Mexican and Asian traffickers use money services businesses—commonly located in their own ethnic communities—to move illicit drug proceeds from the region to other domestic or international locations.<sup>103</sup> Asian traffickers also launder money through area card rooms.<sup>104</sup> For example, in March 2011, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California announced that a federal grand jury in San Francisco had charged 15 members of an Asian DTO with committing racketeering, extortion, extension of credit (loan-sharking), and narcotics offenses related to two Bay Area casino card clubs. During the execution of the search warrants, law enforcement officers seized several hundred thousand dollars in cash, thousands of dollars in casino gambling chips, jewelry, several pounds of drugs, and numerous firearms.<sup>105</sup>

Methamphetamine (particularly ice methamphetamine) and marijuana are the principal drug threats to the Northern Californian HIDTA region.<sup>106</sup> Widespread production, trafficking, and abuse of these drugs are unparalleled in the region.<sup>107</sup> Cocaine and heroin are distributed and abused in the Northern California HIDTA region; however, these drugs pose a lower threat than methamphetamine and marijuana.<sup>108</sup> Powder and crack cocaine are widely available and frequently abused in the region, while crack cocaine is generally the most abused illicit drug in urban areas.<sup>109</sup> Heroin availability and abuse are at moderate to high levels throughout the region.<sup>110</sup> Mexican black tar heroin, the preferred type among long-term abusers, is also the drug of choice among some teenage and young adult OxyContin abusers who switch to heroin because of its lower cost.<sup>111</sup> For example, a prescription opioid abuser could spend approximately \$240 per day to purchase six 80-milligram OxyContin tablets (6 dosage units), whereas the equivalent dosage (about 2 grams) of Mexican black tar heroin would cost the abuser approximately \$80 per day.<sup>112</sup>

The availability and abuse of ODDs, principally MDMA, vary throughout the Northern California HIDTA region—MDMA availability and abuse remain stable at high levels in most areas.<sup>113</sup> Canada-based Asian DTOs smuggle most of the MDMA available in the region from Canada through Washington POEs and into the region.<sup>114</sup> A portion of the MDMA remains in the region for distribution, while the remainder is further transported to other states or southern California for distribution.<sup>115</sup> MDMA is distributed in the region primarily by Asian criminal groups and street gangs in local nightclubs.<sup>116</sup> LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), PCP (phencyclidine), and psilocybin are also available in the region to varying degrees. Traffickers typically obtain these drugs via the Internet.<sup>117</sup> The drugs are commonly distributed and abused at raves, nightclubs, private parties, and college campuses.<sup>118</sup>

CPDs are widely available throughout the region and abused by all age groups.<sup>119</sup> They are frequently diverted through doctor-shopping, drug theft, and prescription forgery.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, CPDs and noncontrolled drugs such as carisoprodol are obtained via the Internet without valid prescriptions.<sup>121</sup> The most commonly abused CPDs include anorectics such as phentermine and phendimetrazine, benzodiazepines, and prescription opioid pain relievers, including hydrocodone and oxycodone products.<sup>122</sup> In an effort to curb CPD misuse, the DEA San Francisco Division collected a total of 11,648.25 pounds of potentially dangerous expired, unused, and unwanted CPDs.<sup>123</sup> These drugs were collected at 96 sites throughout northern California during DEA's first nationwide prescription drug "Take-Back" initiative in September 2010.<sup>124</sup>

## Appendix B. Tables

**Table B1. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities in Northern California HIDTA Counties, by Drug Type, 2006–2010**

Drug Type	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010*
<b>Methamphetamine</b>	14,467	13,923	12,638	10,631	9,375
<b>Marijuana/hashish</b>	5,750	6,065	6,443	5,755	5,051
<b>Cocaine/crack</b>	7,755	7,844	8,169	7,024	4,436
<b>Heroin</b>	9,239	8,192	7,873	7,152	4,681
<b>Other drugs, excluding alcohol</b>	1,652	2,020	2,247	2,564	2,774

Source: California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs.

\*Preliminary data as of February 17, 2011.

**Table B2. Northern California HIDTA Law Enforcement Responses to the National Drug Threat Survey 2011**

Drug	Greatest Drug Threat	Most Contributes to Violent Crime*	Most Contributes to Property Crime
<b>Ice methamphetamine</b>	24	24	28
<b>Powder methamphetamine</b>	5	5	7
<b>Marijuana</b>	6	7	1
<b>Crack cocaine</b>	2	2	2
<b>Powder cocaine</b>	0	0	0
<b>Heroin</b>	0	1	1
<b>CPDs</b>	4	1	2

Source: National Drug Threat Survey 2011.

\*One agency did not respond.

Note: Total number of respondents: 41.

**Table B3. Methamphetamine Laboratory Seizures in the Northern California HIDTA Region, 2006–2010**

Methamphetamine Yield Per Production Cycle	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Less than 2 pounds	27	22	21	15	18
2 to 9 pounds	10	1	2	2	1
10 or more pounds	1	2	3	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>

Source: Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area March 11, 2011.

**Table B4. Methamphetamine-Related Seizures in the Northern California HIDTA Region, 2006–2010**

Year	CGE*	Dumpsites	Ice Conversion Laboratories	Methamphetamine Laboratories	Total
2006	0	2	1	24	27
2007	1	1	3	10	15
2008	4	1	0	15	20
2009	1	4	2	11	18
2010	3	2	7	12	24

Source: National Seizure System, data run date May 16, 2011.

\*Chemicals, Glass, and Equipment

**Table B5. Cannabis Plants Eradicated in the Northern California HIDTA Region, 2006–2010**

	Outdoor Plants					Indoor Plants				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>HIDTA Total</b>	717,740	924,827	985,993	1,006,388	1,018,963	64,142	28,263	67,953	39,316	47,890
<b>State Total</b>	2,791,726	4,791,838	5,139,451	7,365,760	7,204,355	203,559	160,138	182,602	153,820	188,297

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program; Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, February 2011.

## Endnotes

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Marin County Major Crimes Task Force  
Monterey County Sheriff's Office  
Oakland Police Department  
San Francisco County Sheriff's Office  
San Francisco Police Department  
San Jose Police Department  
San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force  
San Mateo Police Department  
Santa Clara County Specialized Enforcement Team  
Santa Cruz County Narcotic Enforcement Team  
Sonoma County Narcotics Task Force  
South Bay Metropolitan Task Force  
State of California  
    Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs  
    Department of Justice  
        Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement  
        Department of Toxic Substances Control

## Federal

Executive Office of the President  
    Office of National Drug Control Policy  
        High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area  
            Central Valley  
            Northern California  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
    Forest Service  
        National Forest System  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
    U.S. Census Bureau  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
    U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
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    Oakland Resident Office  
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Federal Bureau of Investigation  
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Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force  
U.S. Attorneys Office  
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U.S. Department of Transportation  
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