



# Ohio

## High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Drug Market Analysis

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### Preface

This assessment provides a strategic overview of the illicit drug situation in the Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region, highlighting significant trends and law enforcement concerns related to the trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. The report was prepared through detailed analysis of

recent law enforcement reporting, information obtained through interviews with law enforcement and public health officials, and available statistical data. The report is designed to provide policymakers, resource planners, and law enforcement officials with a focused discussion of key drug issues and developments facing the Ohio HIDTA.



Figure 1. Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

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 vetted with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.

## Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- The control that Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) exert over wholesale drug distribution in the Ohio HIDTA region is unrivaled and increasing. Mexican DTOs have supplanted Dominican and Jamaican DTOs as the principal transporters and wholesale distributors of cocaine, marijuana, and heroin in the region.
- Columbus has emerged as a regional distribution center for Mexican brown powder heroin and Mexican black tar heroin that are supplied to drug markets throughout Ohio, West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania. Mexican brown powder heroin and Mexican black tar heroin are now the most common types of heroin available in most areas of the Ohio HIDTA region.
- Heroin use is increasing in the Ohio HIDTA region and throughout the state, predominantly among young Caucasian adults, ages 18 to 25. Many new abusers of heroin, particularly among this group, had previously abused prescription narcotics.
- Methamphetamine production in the Ohio HIDTA counties has decreased significantly over the last year; the number of laboratory, dumpsite, and chemical/glass/equipment seizures decreased from 124 in fiscal year (FY) 2005 to 94 in FY2006. The 2006 Ohio law restricting pseudoephedrine sales most likely contributed to this decrease in methamphetamine production.
- Mexican DTOs are capitalizing on the decrease in local methamphetamine production by marketing Mexican methamphetamine in some areas of the HIDTA region, particularly in the Columbus area.
- Law enforcement reporting indicates that the diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs are increasing in parts of the Ohio HIDTA region, particularly in Columbus and Toledo.

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## Drug Trafficking Organizations, Criminal Groups, and Gangs

**Drug trafficking organizations** are complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs.

**Criminal groups** operating in the United States are numerous and range from small to moderately sized, loosely knit groups that distribute one or more drugs at the retail and midlevels.

**Gangs** are defined by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations as groups or associations of three or more persons with a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, the members of which individually or collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

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## HIDTA Overview

The Ohio HIDTA region consists of Cuyahoga, Lucas, Mahoning, Stark, and Summit Counties in northern Ohio and Fairfield, Franklin, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, and Warren Counties in southern Ohio. These counties comprise more than half of Ohio's population and encompass the nine largest cities in the state. The Ohio HIDTA region is located midway between Chicago and New York City, two of the largest drug distribution centers in the country. The region is linked by numerous interstate highways to major domestic drug source areas, including those near the Southwest Border. In fact, each HIDTA county includes or borders major transportation routes that are used by drug traffickers to smuggle illicit drugs into and through the HIDTA region. Large quantities of these illicit drugs are seized through Ohio HIDTA initiatives. (See Table 1 on page 3.) Mexican and, to a much lesser extent, Dominican and Jamaican DTOs are the predominant transporters of illicit drugs that are delivered to or pass through the area. Large amounts of the drugs transported to the Ohio HIDTA region are abused locally; however, the region serves as a major transit area for illicit drugs supplied to drug markets in the eastern United States. Additionally, Mexican DTOs are expanding

wholesale and midlevel cocaine, heroin, and marijuana distribution operations in the HIDTA region as well as in neighboring jurisdictions.

**Table 1. Quantities of Illicit Drugs Seized Through Ohio HIDTA Initiatives in 2006**

<b>Powder Cocaine</b>	949 kilograms
<b>Crack Cocaine</b>	22 kilograms
<b>Heroin</b>	12 kilograms
<b>Khat</b>	1,589 kilograms
<b>Marijuana</b>	10,314 kilograms
<b>MDMA</b>	5,472 dosage units
<b>Methamphetamine</b>	1.0 kilograms
<b>PCP (phencyclidine)</b>	27 kilograms
<b>Diverted Pharmaceuticals</b>	17,000 dosage units

Source: Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

## Drug Threat Overview

The distribution and abuse of cocaine, particularly crack, pose the greatest drug threat to the Ohio HIDTA region, largely because of violent crime and property crime attendant to distribution and abuse of the drug, as well as the significant strain on public health resources occasioned by cocaine abuse. Powder cocaine and crack cocaine are widely available; however, crack cocaine is preferred by most abusers in the region. Mexican DTOs are the primary wholesale distributors of powder cocaine, while African American criminal groups and street gangs are the principal retail distributors of both powder cocaine and crack.

The trafficking of marijuana and heroin and the diversion of pharmaceutical drugs also pose a threat to the HIDTA region. Commercial-grade Mexican marijuana is widely available and is supplemented by local production. Heroin availability is increasing in the area, primarily through the efforts of Mexican traffickers who have become more prominent in the transportation and distribution of illicit drugs in the HIDTA region. The diversion, distribution, and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs, particularly OxyContin and Percocet (oxycodone) and Xanax (alprazolam), have

been long-standing problems; however, the diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs are escalating in some areas of the HIDTA region, including Columbus and Toledo.

Other drugs such as methamphetamine, PCP (phencyclidine), MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy), and GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) are available to varying degrees throughout the HIDTA region but pose a much lesser threat than cocaine, heroin, and marijuana. Local methamphetamine production has decreased significantly in the HIDTA region since FY2005, although safety and environmental concerns regarding the remediation of clandestine laboratories remain. Mexican methamphetamine availability has increased slightly but remains limited in the HIDTA region. PCP is available primarily in Cleveland and occasionally transits the HIDTA region en route to eastern destinations such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. MDMA is available primarily in urban areas and on college campuses. GHB is available in limited quantities in Columbus.

## Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican DTOs have emerged as the principal wholesale distributors of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana in the Ohio HIDTA region over the past five years, displacing Dominican and Jamaican DTOs. The dominance of Mexican DTOs over wholesale drug distribution is unrivaled and increasing in the Ohio HIDTA region and is particularly pronounced in the Columbus area, where these DTOs are now marketing Mexican methamphetamine. Additionally, these DTOs are increasing supplies of Mexican brown powder and Mexican black tar heroin in Columbus. As a result, the city has developed into a distribution center for Mexican heroin destined for drug markets throughout Ohio, West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania. Accordingly, Columbus law enforcement officials report that the number and size of heroin submissions to crime laboratories for analysis are increasing and often involve kilogram quantities, which were rarely encountered in the past. Moreover, Mexican DTOs have also introduced Mexican brown powder heroin and

Mexican black tar heroin to drug markets in cities such as Toledo, where heroin has generally been less available.

Currently, Dominican and Jamaican DTOs are active only in heroin and cocaine markets in north-eastern Ohio. These DTOs distribute primarily South American (SA) heroin and cocaine that they transport to the area from New York City. Dominican and Jamaican DTOs are more frequently being challenged by Mexican DTOs for control of these markets and, as a result, may be compelled to protect their distribution areas from rival Mexican DTOs, a situation that may lead to violent confrontations.

Local and nationally affiliated street gangs<sup>1</sup> distribute significant quantities of cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and other illicit drugs at the retail level in the Ohio HIDTA region; in doing so, they contribute significantly to the overall crime rate. Most street gangs in the HIDTA region are local groups that have a propensity for violence that is incited when rival gang members threaten other gang members and their families or attempt to take over their drug distribution territories. Estimates indicate that there are more than 120 street gangs in Cuyahoga County; most are centered in Cleveland and distribute drugs, primarily crack cocaine and marijuana. Most of the street gangs in Cleveland are local, taking their names and defining their territories based on the street or housing project in which they live. Additionally, there are a few nationally affiliated gangs in the city, such as Latin Kings, Crips and, possibly, Sureños. In March 2006 Cleveland was one of six cities nationwide chosen to receive a federal grant to combat gang-related violence. With the help of this grant, Cleveland has been successfully targeting the most violent Cleveland gangs involved in drug trafficking, such as 7-Alls, Quarter Boys, and Dirty 30s. Youngstown also has a significant street gang problem; similar types of local street gangs engage in drug distribution, theft, and vandalism. Law enforcement officials in

Youngstown have also successfully targeted several street gangs and last May arrested 33 members of South Side Soldiers, L Unit, and Dale Boys, three rival street gangs operating on the south side of the city. In addition, the Latin Kings and Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13) street gangs have a presence in Columbus; however, the extent of their drug trafficking activities is unconfirmed.

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### **Indictment of 7-Alls Street Gang Members in Cleveland**

In January 2007 an 18-month investigation of the 7-Alls street gang culminated in a 95-count indictment charging 43 defendants with conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute and/or distribution of more than 50 grams of crack cocaine. The street gang operates in Cleveland from East 70th Street to East 79th Street between Superior and Saint Clair Avenues. The investigation took place from May of 2005 to December of 2006; during that period law enforcement officers purchased or seized tens of thousands of dollars worth of crack and powder cocaine and recovered two illegal firearms and \$151,000 in cash.

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Source: U.S. Attorney Northern District of Ohio.

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### **Production**

Methamphetamine production in the Ohio HIDTA region has decreased significantly over the last year as a result of aggressive law enforcement efforts, public awareness campaigns, and statewide precursor chemical control legislation, which was enacted in May 2006. National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System (NCLSS) data show a 24 percent decrease in the number of seized methamphetamine laboratories, dumpsites, and chemicals/glass/equipment in Ohio HIDTA counties from FY2005 (124) to FY2006 (94). Notably, Summit County reported the highest number of seizures in both FY2005 (72) and FY2006 (67); those numbers represent 58 percent and 71 percent, respectively, of all seizures in Ohio HIDTA counties during

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1. A gang is defined by the Ohio Revised Code as an ongoing formal or informal organization, association, or group of three or more persons to which all of the following apply: it has as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more criminal offenses; it has a common name, identifying signs, symbols, or colors; and the members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.

those years. Despite the apparent decrease in methamphetamine laboratories in the region, continued small-scale methamphetamine production by local independent dealers creates severe environmental and health concerns for law enforcement officers and those who live at or near production sites; such methamphetamine production also taxes the limited resources of the agencies that remediate these sites.

Large amounts of powder cocaine are converted to crack cocaine by African American criminal groups and street gangs at or near local distribution sites in the Ohio HIDTA region. Crack conversion is a particular threat in the Cleveland area, where a large number of street gangs that convert and distribute crack cocaine also frequently engage in drug-related criminal activity, including assault, homicide, and theft. However, law enforcement officials in Cleveland report recent decreases in the level of crack conversion occurring in the city, reportedly because the penalties associated with crack cocaine are harsher than those associated with powder cocaine.

Most of the marijuana available in the Ohio HIDTA region is transported to the area from Mexico; however, cannabis is cultivated locally at both indoor and outdoor grow sites. Indoor cannabis cultivation is more common than outdoor cultivation in the Ohio HIDTA region and is typically conducted by local Caucasian producers in private residences, particularly rental homes. Moreover, law enforcement reporting in 2006 indicates that Vietnamese criminal groups have purchased several residences in Medina and Lorain Counties (which border the Cleveland metropolitan area) for the sole purpose of producing high-potency marijuana. Twelve Vietnamese individuals connected to these grow operations have been arrested; one of these individuals is from Canada and another is from Georgia. Outdoor cannabis cultivation occasionally takes place in remote areas in the Ohio HIDTA region and throughout the state, particularly in southeastern Ohio.

## Transportation

The extensive transportation infrastructure in Ohio, particularly the interstate highway system, is exploited by DTOs to transport drugs into and throughout the HIDTA region. North-south highways, such as Interstates 71, 75, and 77, and east-west highways, such as I-70 and I-80/90, are used by traffickers to transport illicit drugs from distribution centers along the Southwest Border and the East Coast. (See Figure 2 on page 6.)

Mexican DTOs are transporting increasing amounts of cocaine, marijuana, and Mexican black tar and brown powder heroin to the Ohio HIDTA region. These DTOs have also begun to transport Mexican methamphetamine that they produce to the Columbus area. Until recently Mexican DTOs primarily used supply routes through cities such as Chicago and Detroit to transport illicit drugs to Ohio. Currently, Mexican DTOs are shipping illicit drugs directly from the Southwest Border more often than through Chicago and Detroit; the drugs are destined for local markets that include Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown. These Ohio cities now supply smaller markets in the Ohio HIDTA region, such as Barberton, Lancaster, and North Canton, and smaller markets located in Ohio but outside the HIDTA region, such as Delaware, Johnstown, London, and Newark. Mexican DTOs transport illicit drugs to the region in private and commercial vehicles equipped with sophisticated hidden compartments and, to a lesser extent, through package delivery services and couriers aboard commercial aircraft.

Dominican and Jamaican DTOs transport SA heroin and some cocaine to northeastern HIDTA markets, including Cleveland, Youngstown, and Summit County. These DTOs typically transport SA heroin and cocaine from New York City in private vehicles. Somalian groups transport wholesale quantities of khat into the Columbus area for local consumption, typically using package delivery services. In 2006 law enforcement officials in the Columbus area seized approximately 3,000 pounds of khat, all of which was discovered in parcels.

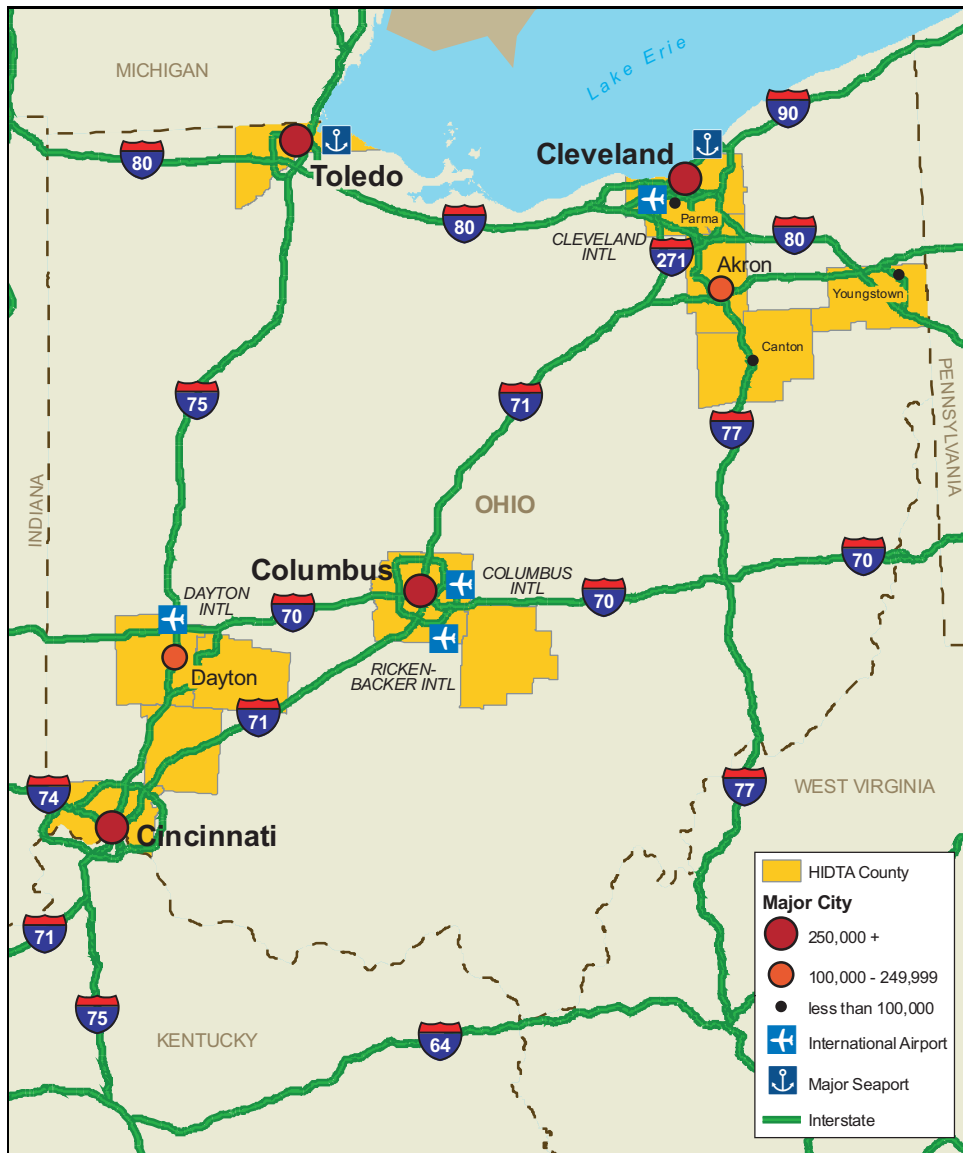


Figure 2. Ohio HIDTA region transportation infrastructure.

## Distribution

Mexican DTOs are the primary wholesale distributors of cocaine, marijuana, and Mexican brown powder and Mexican black tar heroin in the Ohio HIDTA region; they also engage in retail distribution of Mexican heroin in Columbus. These traffickers also supply Mexican methamphetamine to some areas of the HIDTA region, such as Akron and Columbus. Moreover, Mexican DTOs supply large quantities of cocaine, marijuana, and Mexican heroin to African American and Caucasian criminal groups, local independent dealers, and street gangs for retail distribution. Dominican and Jamaican DTOs distribute heroin and cocaine in

the northeastern counties of the HIDTA region, although their market share is decreasing as Mexican DTOs make incursions into northeastern Ohio drug markets. African American criminal groups and street gangs distribute crack cocaine at the retail level throughout the region, particularly in urban areas.

Several cities in the HIDTA region serve as distribution centers for Ohio drug markets outside the HIDTA region and in neighboring states. Columbus serves as a distribution center for Mexican brown powder and Mexican black tar heroin for markets east and south of the city as well as in West

Virginia. Distributors outside Columbus typically travel to the city, purchase heroin from local distributors, and transport it back to their local areas for distribution. Dayton serves as a distribution center for Cincinnati, Columbus, and Toledo as well as for Louisville and Lexington, Kentucky. Additionally, cities in the northeastern part of the HIDTA region, such as Cleveland, Akron, and Youngstown, often serve as distribution centers for each other, particularly when supplies dwindle in one of the cities.

Pharmaceutical diversion is increasing in the Ohio HIDTA region and most often involves Caucasian independent dealers and abusers. Pharmaceuticals are typically diverted in the region through prescription fraud, doctor-shopping, and pharmacy robberies. Additionally, abusers acquire pharmaceuticals over the Internet and have the drugs shipped to them through package delivery services.

Khat distribution in the Ohio HIDTA region is limited. Khat sales take place primarily among members of the relatively large Somali community in Columbus, some of whom abuse the drug.

## **Drug-Related Crime**

Crack cocaine is the drug that most contributes to property crime and violent crime in the Ohio HIDTA region, according to law enforcement officials in the area. Crack cocaine distributors have been implicated in assaults and homicides, while abusers have been implicated in shoplifting, burglary, robbery, and theft. Distributors and abusers of other illicit drugs, particularly heroin, also engage in drug-related criminal activity to varying degrees. For instance, law enforcement officials in Columbus report a recent increase in the number of pharmacy robberies involving pharmaceutical distributors and abusers.

## **Abuse**

Marijuana is the most widely available and abused illicit drug in the HIDTA region; however, law enforcement officials report that marijuana trafficking and abuse do not pose as great a threat as the trafficking and abuse of other drugs such as heroin,

crack cocaine, and powder cocaine, particularly since marijuana is not often associated with violent crime. Treatment providers report that cocaine, particularly crack cocaine, is still the drug of choice among abusers in Ohio. Additionally, the total number of individuals who receive publicly funded treatment for powder and crack cocaine abuse remains higher than that for any other drug except marijuana. Heroin abuse is increasing in the Ohio HIDTA region; the number of individuals who receive publicly funded treatment for heroin has nearly tripled since 1997, and more than 9 percent of all treatment cases involved heroin abuse in 2006, compared with 3.6 percent a decade ago. Further, a recent study on heroin abuse by the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network (OSAM) indicates that heroin is widely available and increasingly abused, especially by young people in the state.

Pharmaceutical drug abuse remains stable at high levels throughout the HIDTA region, with OxyContin reportedly the most abused drug. Most abusers crush OxyContin to defeat the drug's time-release mechanism and then inhale the powder; however, in Cuyahoga County many abusers have switched to injecting the drug. Additionally, treatment providers in Dayton report that the abuse of buprenorphine increased during the 6-month period ending in June 2006. According to OSAM, many users buy the drug illegally on the street, not for the purpose of getting high, but, rather, to lessen the

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### **Toledo Physician Indicted for Diversion of Prescription Drugs**

In December 2006 a Toledo physician was indicted for illegally distributing prescription narcotics. The indictment alleges that from January 2002 through October 2004 the physician illegally distributed over 1.6 million OxyContin and Percocet tablets, often to patients who the physician knew were drug addicts or who were selling the drugs to others. Prescriptions for the drugs were typically written without a complete medical examination and were not for legitimate medical purposes.

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Source: U.S. Attorney Northern District of Ohio.

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symptoms associated with withdrawal from narcotic drugs such as heroin and OxyContin.

## **Illicit Finance**

Drug-related money laundering in the Ohio HIDTA region typically involves the transportation of illicit drug proceeds in bulk from major metropolitan areas in the state to Mexico and to domestic drug markets, including those in Florida, New York, and southwestern states. Bulk currency typically is transported overland by Mexican DTOs in the same private and commercial vehicles used to transport drugs into the area. Traffickers also transport drug proceeds in bulk using couriers aboard commercial flights and through parcel delivery services, albeit to a lesser extent than by vehicle. Most drug proceeds transported to other domestic drug markets are eventually smuggled from the United States in bulk, often along with proceeds from other markets, and placed in foreign financial institutions for repatriation. Traffickers operating in the Ohio HIDTA region also launder illicit drug proceeds through other means, including commingling drug proceeds with revenue generated by legitimate businesses, using money services businesses, structuring bank deposits and money order purchases, and purchasing real estate and luxury vehicles.

## **Outlook**

Mexican DTOs will further expand their control over illicit drug distribution in the Ohio HIDTA region over the next year. As they increase the supply of cocaine and Mexican brown powder heroin and Mexican black tar heroin, they will

make further incursions into drug markets typically controlled by Dominican and Jamaican DTOs in the northeastern part of the HIDTA region.

Dominican and Jamaican DTOs that are challenged by Mexican DTOs for control of northeastern Ohio drug markets may attempt to protect their distribution territories, possibly leading to violent confrontations.

Declining local methamphetamine production and the growing presence of Mexican DTOs may lead to increased availability of Mexican methamphetamine throughout the entire Ohio HIDTA region. Mexican DTOs already dominate the transportation and wholesale distribution of other illicit drugs in the Ohio HIDTA region, using well-established routes and methods that would easily allow them to increase the flow of methamphetamine to the region if the demand were to increase. The ability of Mexican DTOs to supply and aggressively market methamphetamine could result in an increase in demand.

Vietnamese criminal groups will quite likely introduce high-potency, indoor cannabis grow sites, similar to those discovered in neighboring Medina and Lorain Counties in 2006, into the Ohio HIDTA region, increasing the availability of high-potency marijuana.



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## Sources

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### Local, State, and Regional

Greene County Agencies for Combined Enforcement Task Force  
Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation  
Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services  
    Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network  
Summit County Sheriff's Office  
Toledo Police Department  
Warren County Drug Task Force

### Federal

Executive Office of the President  
    Office of National Drug Control Policy  
        Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area  
            Akron/Summit County HIDTA Initiative  
            Caribbean/Gang Drug Task Force  
            Commercial Vehicle Intelligence Initiative  
            Drug Enforcement Administration Youngstown Task Force  
            Mahoning Valley Drug Task Force  
            Miami Valley Drug Task Force  
            Money Laundering Intelligence Initiative  
            Northeast Ohio Interdiction Task Force  
            Northwest Ohio HIDTA Task Force  
            South Central Drug Task Force  
            Southwest Ohio Regional Drug Task Force  
            Stark County Violent Crimes Task Force  
            Toledo Metro Drug Task Force

U.S. Department of Commerce  
    U.S. Census Bureau

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
    Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
        Office of Applied Studies  
        Treatment Episode Data Set

U.S. Department of Justice  
    Criminal Division  
        Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force  
Drug Enforcement Administration  
    Detroit Division Office  
        Columbus District Office  
            Cleveland Resident Office  
            Youngstown Resident Office

El Paso Intelligence Center

National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Cleveland Division

U.S. Attorney's Offices

Northern District of Ohio

Southern District of Ohio

U.S. Department of the Treasury

Internal Revenue Service

**Other**

*The Plain Dealer*

*The Vindicator*

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