



Michigan

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Drug Market Analysis

June 2007

U.S. Department of Justice

Preface

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

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



Figure 1. Michigan 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

- Methamphetamine production in the Michigan HIDTA region has declined significantly as a result of successful law enforcement initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and state-level precursor control legislation. Methamphetamine laboratory incidents¹ in Michigan HIDTA counties decreased 44 percent from 2005 to 2006.
- Clandestinely produced fentanyl, often mixed with and sold as heroin, has emerged as a serious drug threat in the Detroit area. At least 212 fentanyl-related overdose deaths have occurred in the Detroit area since August 2005. Some abusers knowingly abuse fentanyl, while others unwittingly use it under the impression that it is heroin. The large numbers of overdoses and deaths have been a deterrent to some abusers; however, the higher potency of heroin/fentanyl combinations appeals to some heroin abusers in the area who seek a more intense euphoric effect.
- Heroin use is increasing throughout Michigan, particularly among young female Caucasian abusers. Some abusers of prescription narcotics such as OxyContin substitute heroin when they have difficulty obtaining pharmaceuticals.
- Chaldean² criminal groups in the HIDTA region are increasingly distributing MDMA, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, and marijuana. They also engage in fraud and money laundering activities. Metropolitan Detroit is home to the largest Chaldean population outside Iraq, and this population is expected to grow as additional Iraqi refugees enter the United States and relocate to the Detroit area.

HIDTA Overview

The Michigan HIDTA comprises five counties in eastern Michigan (Genesee, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne) and four counties in western Michigan (Allegan, Kalamazoo, Kent, and Van

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.

Buren). (See [Figure 1 on page 1.](#)) Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo are the primary drug markets in the region; they serve as regional distribution centers for many smaller drug markets within the HIDTA region as well as markets in the midwestern and northeastern United States.

Detroit, the largest and most influential drug market in Michigan, is connected to Canada by the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. (See [Figure 2 on page 3.](#)) The Ambassador Bridge is the world's busiest commercial border crossing. Illicit drugs, particularly high-potency Canadian marijuana and MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy), are transported to Detroit from Canada; in return cocaine and bulk currency derived from U.S. drug sales are smuggled back into Canada. Despite Detroit's proximity to Canada and an international border, most of the cocaine and commercial-grade marijuana available in metropolitan area originates in locations at or near the U.S.–Mexico border. Heroin is transported to the area from New York City, Chicago, southern California, and Florida. Detroit is a regional distribution center for cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and MDMA, supplying markets

1. Methamphetamine laboratory incidents include seizures of laboratories, dumpsites, and chemicals and equipment.

2. Chaldeans are ethnically Iraqi individuals who practice the Catholic religion.



Figure 2. International border between Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario.

throughout Michigan and several other states, including Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

Flint's location approximately 70 miles north of Detroit facilitates drug trafficking and gang activity within the area. Drug distributors in Flint are typically supplied by traffickers in Detroit; however, some local distributors have contacts in Chicago and Southwest Border states from whom they directly purchase wholesale quantities of drugs.

Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo are located in southwestern Michigan, midway between Detroit and Chicago. Most of the illicit drugs available in

the Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids area are transported from Chicago and, to a lesser extent, Detroit and the Southwest Border area. Local drug production, particularly methamphetamine production, also occurs but has declined significantly as a result of recent pseudoephedrine sales restrictions, law enforcement initiatives, and public awareness campaigns. Local college students contribute to drug availability and abuse by obtaining illicit drugs, primarily MDMA and pharmaceuticals, in their hometowns and bringing them back to the Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids area for limited distribution and personal use.

Drug Threat Overview

Cocaine, particularly crack cocaine, poses the most significant drug threat in the Michigan HIDTA region; the distribution and abuse of the drug have a profound impact on law enforcement and public health resources. Crack cocaine conversion typically occurs in urban areas of the HIDTA region. Crack cocaine abusers often commit crimes such as burglary, robbery, theft, and retail fraud to obtain the drug, while distributors commit assault and homicide to control their local drug markets and protect their trafficking operations. Methamphetamine production, previously a significant threat in western HIDTA counties, significantly declined during 2006, largely as a result of statewide legislation enacted in December 2005 restricting the sale of and access to products containing pseudoephedrine and ephedrine as well as directed law enforcement and public awareness campaigns. Accordingly, methamphetamine laboratory incidents in HIDTA counties decreased approximately 44 percent in 2006.

The trafficking and abuse of other drugs, such as heroin, marijuana, MDMA, and pharmaceuticals, pose persistent threats within the HIDTA region as well. The availability and abuse of heroin appear to be increasing in the Detroit and Flint areas, particularly among young Caucasian abusers. Heroin abuse among high school students in the Kalamazoo area also appears to be increasing. Law enforcement officials estimate that approximately 70 percent of heroin seized in the HIDTA region is South American (SA), 25 percent is Southwest Asian (SWA), and the remainder is Mexican and, to a very limited extent, Southeast Asian (SEA). Marijuana is readily available and widely abused; commercial-grade Mexican marijuana is the most prevalent type in the region, but high-potency Canadian and locally produced marijuana are also available. Canadian marijuana and MDMA transit the Detroit area destined for other U.S. drug markets; however, some is retained in the HIDTA region for local distribution and abuse. Diverted pharmaceuticals such as fentanyl, hydrocodone, methadone, OxyContin, Vicodin, and Xanax are also abused in the region. Fentanyl, clandestinely produced in Mexico and often mixed with and sold as

heroin or cocaine, posed a serious drug threat in the Detroit area in late 2005 and in 2006.

Drug Trafficking Organizations

African American drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and criminal groups are the predominant traffickers in the HIDTA region. They distribute wholesale quantities of cocaine, marijuana, and heroin and are also emerging as distributors of MDMA that they obtain from Canada. Some of these African American traffickers have made direct connections with Mexican sources and are transporting drugs directly from Southwest Border states into Michigan. African American distributors in the HIDTA region also engage in drug-related violence, including assault and homicide, to maintain control of local drug markets.

Mexican, Caucasian, Asian (usually Vietnamese), and Middle Eastern (typically Chaldean, Lebanese, and Yemeni) DTOs and criminal groups also distribute wholesale quantities of drugs in the

Iraqi Refugees Likely to Relocate to Metropolitan Detroit

Metropolitan Detroit, home to the largest population of Chaldeans outside Iraq, may be gaining an even larger Chaldean population. The U.S. government plans to allow 7,000 additional Iraqi refugees into the country within the next year, a significant increase over the 466 Iraqis who have been permitted entry into the United States since the beginning of the War in Iraq in 2003. According to estimates by the Chaldean Federation of America, at least 60 percent of the 7,000 Iraqi refugees will move to Michigan. Chaldean criminals in Detroit are distributing Canadian MDMA, Mexican marijuana, and powder cocaine and crack cocaine that they purchase from other criminal groups. Some Chaldean criminals own gas stations and convenience stores throughout the Detroit area, from where they operate wire remittance service businesses, which they reportedly use to launder illicit proceeds.

Source: U.S. Department of State; Detroit Free Press.

HIDTA region to varying degrees. Law enforcement officials have identified 118 ethnically based DTOs that operate within the Michigan HIDTA region; approximately 28 of these DTOs operate internationally, 42 operate in multiple states, and 51 operate locally. Mexican DTOs distribute wholesale quantities of marijuana and powder cocaine. Caucasian and Middle Eastern DTOs distribute wholesale quantities of marijuana and powder cocaine. Asian DTOs and East Indian truck drivers, whom the DTOs employ as transporters, often smuggle Canadian marijuana and MDMA into the HIDTA region for local and national distribution. Various groups also transport MDMA into and through HIDTA counties, including Caucasian college students who travel to Canada to purchase MDMA for personal use and limited distribution. Middle Eastern DTOs distribute Canadian and Mexican marijuana and MDMA, especially in the Detroit area, where they operate many gas stations and convenience stores from which they are suspected of selling pseudoephedrine to methamphetamine producers, circumventing recent precursor control legislation. In addition to drug trafficking, some criminal organizations smuggle weapons and illegal aliens when the opportunity arises.

Numerous street gangs and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) operate in the HIDTA region, including approximately 10 large gangs in Detroit. Many of these street gangs and OMGs are involved in illegal drug distribution and commit violent crimes such as assault, robbery, and homicide to protect illicit drug operations. Street gangs in the HIDTA region typically are turf-oriented neighborhood gangs; however, some are nationally affiliated, such as Black Mafia Family. Street gangs often distribute cocaine, heroin, and marijuana at the retail level. Some Michigan street gangs are recruiting new members as young as 13 to 15 years of age to sell crack and marijuana to their peers. OMGs within the HIDTA region also distribute drugs such as methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, MDMA, Oxy-Contin, and Vicodin. Many of these OMGs are affiliated with national and international OMGs and typically engage in other criminal activities, including promoting prostitution and committing theft, fraud, homicide, arson, and weapons trafficking.

Black Mafia Family Cocaine Distribution in Detroit

In March 2007 the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan announced the indictments of 17 individuals resulting from a 7-year investigation of Black Mafia Family, a suspected multistate cocaine trafficking organization. Since late 2006 a total of 58 individuals have been indicted on charges of conspiracy to distribute cocaine and money laundering. Black Mafia Family allegedly distributed multikilogram quantities of cocaine in the Detroit metropolitan area beginning in the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, the organization's distribution activities had extended into other states, including Kentucky, Georgia, Missouri, California, and Texas. During the course of the investigation, law enforcement authorities seized approximately 1,100 pounds of cocaine and \$19 million in assets, including bank accounts, cash, real property, jewelry, and vehicles. In addition, Black Mafia Family members allegedly used drug proceeds to purchase winning Michigan lottery tickets from an individual who had obtained them from the true winners for cash. These winning tickets, valued at over \$1 million, were redeemed, and the proceeds were used to purchase homes and vehicles and to make mortgage payments.

Source: U.S. Attorney Eastern District of Michigan.

Production

Illicit drug production in the Michigan HIDTA region is typically limited to crack cocaine conversion, small-scale methamphetamine production, and cannabis cultivation.

Crack cocaine conversion is a significant concern, particularly in the urban areas of the HIDTA region, where it is associated with high levels of abuse, property crime, and related violence. Retail-level crack cocaine distributors, generally African Americans, convert powder cocaine to crack at various locations, including private residences and hotel rooms. Once powder cocaine has been converted to crack cocaine, distribution occurs, typically in small quantities in the neighborhoods where the drug was converted.

Methamphetamine production occurs primarily in rural areas of the HIDTA region; however, some laboratory operators also use hotel rooms in more populated areas, such as Kalamazoo. Law enforcement initiatives and state-level precursor control legislation enacted in December 2005 contributed to a 44 percent decrease in methamphetamine laboratory incidents in HIDTA counties from 2005 to 2006. (See [Figure 3 on page 7.](#)) Remaining methamphetamine laboratories are operated primarily by Caucasian and, to a lesser extent, Mexican local independent producers for personal use, producing only a few grams of methamphetamine per production cycle. Producers frequently change laboratory locations, a practice that is problematic for law enforcement, especially when methamphetamine cooks cross county lines. Methamphetamine production poses significant danger to individuals, property, and the environment. Laboratory operators and other individuals near methamphetamine laboratory sites, often children, are harmed during the production process or as a result of laboratory fires and explosions. Moreover, law enforcement personnel and first responders can be injured during a laboratory seizure or when responding to an emergency situation involving a laboratory. Child abuse and neglect are also common when guardians produce methamphetamine. Improper storage and disposal of chemicals and chemical waste involved in the production of methamphetamine often result in severe environmental damage and costly soil and structure remediation.

Law enforcement initiatives and other programs that address the availability of precursor and essential chemicals used in the methamphetamine production process have contributed to decreased laboratory seizures in the HIDTA region. For example, Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids area law enforcement officials have conducted surveillance of tanks containing anhydrous ammonia, a common farm fertilizer used in methamphetamine production. Law enforcement surveillance, the use of GloTell,³ and related media coverage have resulted in fewer anhydrous ammonia thefts. Additionally, a new chemical additive has been developed to further

deter anhydrous ammonia thefts: “Chemical Lock” (the addition of calcium nitrate to anhydrous ammonia) reportedly reduces methamphetamine production from a typical yield of 42 percent to approximately 2 percent.

Most of the marijuana available in the HIDTA region is produced in Mexico or Canada, but some is grown locally at both outdoor and indoor grow sites. Outdoor cultivation often occurs on state-owned property, on other property not owned by the grower, and in fields among legitimate crops. Indoor cultivation generally takes place in private residences owned or rented by African American and Caucasian independent growers; high-potency marijuana is typically produced at these sites for local distribution.

Transportation

The diverse transportation infrastructure of the Michigan HIDTA region is exploited by DTOs to transport drugs into and through the region from source areas in Mexico and Canada. Private and commercial vehicles are used by traffickers to transport drugs along Interstates 94, 75, and 69 and U.S. Route 23 into and through the region; traffickers also employ couriers on trains, buses, and private and commercial aircraft to transport illicit drugs. Illicit drugs transported in passenger vehicles are often placed in hidden compartments; drugs transported in commercial vehicles generally are placed in hidden compartments or commingled with legitimate products such as produce, car parts, building materials, or heavy machinery. Some criminals also ship marijuana, cocaine, and MDMA through the U.S. Postal Service and parcel delivery services in order to reduce transportation costs and increase profits.

Michigan’s common border with Canada offers traffickers numerous opportunities to transport marijuana and MDMA from Canada into the HIDTA region. The Ambassador Bridge is the main North American trade link between the United States and Canada, handling more than \$206 billion in cross-border commodities annually and providing a major conduit for drug transportation from Canada into the

3. GloTell is a chemical additive that stains potential anhydrous ammonia thieves as well as any methamphetamine produced with treated anhydrous ammonia, making theft less appealing.

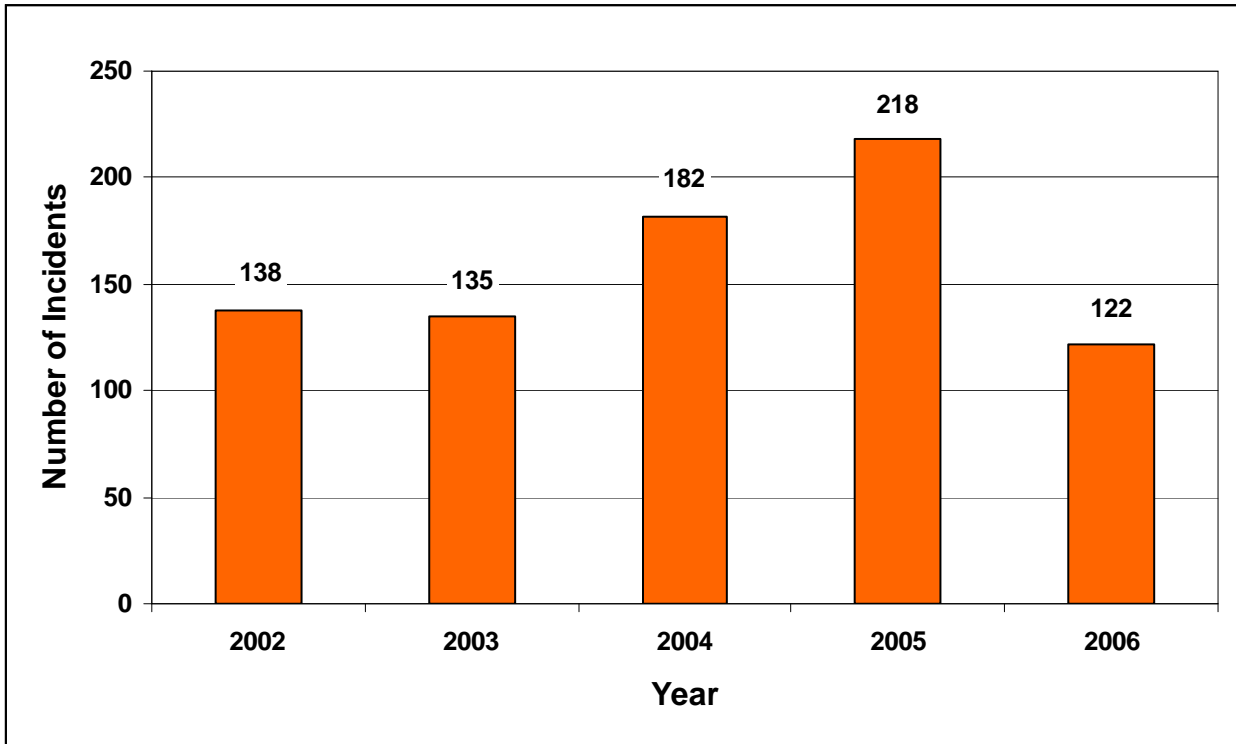


Figure 3. Methamphetamine laboratory incidents in Michigan HIDTA Counties, 2002–2006.

Source: National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System, data run on 4/4/07.

United States; it is the world’s busiest commercial border crossing and North America’s busiest international border crossing. More than 13,000 trucks and 25,000 automobiles cross the Ambassador Bridge daily. The Detroit-Windsor Tunnel is also a heavily used point of entry from Canada into the United States, handling over 27,000 vehicles daily. Large quantities of Canadian marijuana and MDMA are routinely seized as traffickers attempt to transport these drugs from Canada into the United States through Detroit. (See Table 1.) Additionally, there are approximately 950,000 registered watercraft in Michigan and 1.4 million registered watercraft in Ontario, Canada, some of which are used to transport illicit drugs across the border, usually in remote areas.

African American and Mexican DTOs are the principal transporters of cocaine and commercial-grade marijuana into and through the Michigan HIDTA region, particularly from source areas in Mexico and states such as Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, and Texas. Mexican traffickers

also transport wholesale quantities of SA heroin, methamphetamine and, to a lesser extent, Mexican brown powder and black tar heroin into the region.

Asian (often Vietnamese) DTOs and East Indian truck drivers (who are employed by Asian DTOs) and, to a lesser extent, eastern European DTOs transport wholesale quantities of high-potency Canadian marijuana and MDMA into the area; on their return trips, these DTOs often smuggle powder cocaine and money derived from sales in U.S. drug markets into Canada.

Table 1. Marijuana and MDMA Seizures at the Detroit POE, in Kilograms, 2004–2006

Year	Marijuana	MDMA
2004	1,034.2	15.0
2005	2,543.2	79.4
2006	1,373.0	367.1

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Technology Assists in Border Seizures

Law enforcement agencies use various high-technology tools to detect illicit drug shipments entering the HIDTA region, particularly from Canada. Law enforcement officials use Mobile VACIS®, a nonintrusive gamma ray imaging system,^a to scan large vehicles such as tractor-trailers that are used by traffickers to transport illegal drugs across the U.S.–Canada border. VACIS has resulted in numerous seizures, including the detection of approximately 600,000 MDMA tablets found in a hidden compartment in a truck in December 2006; this was the largest MDMA seizure ever in the Detroit area.

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration.

a. The Mobile VACIS inspection system consists of a truck-mounted, nonintrusive gamma ray system that produces images that are used to search vehicles and cargo for the purpose of identifying contraband, including illicit drugs and explosive materials. The Mobile VACIS system utilizes gamma rays as opposed to x-rays, which allows for a lower operating cost, smaller operating space, safer operations, and better system reliability.

Traffickers also transport other illicit drugs into the HIDTA region. African American and Middle Eastern traffickers transport SWA heroin and very limited quantities of SEA heroin into the region, predominantly from New York City. Independent African American and Caucasian dealers and Michigan college students transport MDMA from Canada into the region. Additionally, local Caucasian abusers transport pharmaceutical drugs, which they obtain from doctor-shopping in neighboring states, into their home communities.

Various DTOs, criminal groups, and independent dealers from the region and neighboring areas transport most of the drugs available in the Flint area from Detroit and most of the drugs available in the Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids area from Detroit or Chicago. Recently, some Chicago-based criminal groups have altered their methods to bypass Chicago and I-94, the most direct route to Michigan, when transporting illicit drugs from the Southwest Border area to the Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids area. These groups now travel through Indianapolis, Columbus,

and Cleveland in an effort to circumvent law enforcement pressure in Chicago.

Distribution

The Michigan HIDTA region, especially Detroit, serves as a distribution center for drug markets in Michigan and other states, including Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia. However, significant amounts of illicit drugs transported to the HIDTA region remain in the area for local distribution. DTOs distribute both wholesale and retail quantities of illicit drugs throughout the HIDTA region, with particular groups dominating each drug market. In Detroit, for example, African American DTOs and criminal groups control most wholesale drug distribution, particularly of powder cocaine, heroin, and marijuana; however, Mexican, Caucasian, and Middle Eastern criminal groups also distribute illicit drugs at the wholesale level in the city. Much of the wholesale drug distribution in the Flint area, including distribution of powder cocaine and heroin, is controlled by Mexican and African American criminal groups. Drug distribution in the Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids area is controlled by Mexican, African American, and Caucasian criminal groups.

Retail-level drug distribution occurs throughout the Michigan HIDTA region. African American criminal groups are the primary retail-level distributors of crack cocaine and heroin throughout the area; they also distribute retail-level quantities of marijuana in urban areas within the HIDTA region, but to a lesser extent. Drug sales at the retail level, especially of crack cocaine, often occur in private homes, however, some street sales take place in inner-city areas, and other sales occur at prearranged sites. For example, some local dealers accommodate suburban crack cocaine abusers who are uneasy about traveling to inner-city areas to purchase the drug. Retail-level distribution also takes place in public bars, nightclubs, and hotel rooms throughout the Michigan HIDTA region.

African American criminal groups are the primary retail-level distributors of most illicit drugs in

the HIDTA region, particularly crack cocaine, heroin, and marijuana. African American criminal groups are also emerging as retail MDMA distributors in the region. Other criminal groups also distribute illicit drugs at the retail level within particular areas of the HIDTA. In Detroit, Mexican criminal groups distribute marijuana, cocaine, and heroin. Chaldean criminals in Detroit distribute Canadian MDMA, Mexican marijuana, and cocaine. A Russian criminal group in Detroit has been involved in the distribution of OxyContin, MDMA, and other club drugs; more recently, this criminal group has been marketing nitrous oxide to youth in the area. In the Flint area, Mexican and Caucasian criminal groups are retail distributors of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and MDMA. Heroin distribution in Flint is increasing, largely because distributors know that they can make a larger profit through heroin distribution and that the penalty associated with such trafficking is less than that for crack cocaine distribution. College students from the local area and around the state often gather in the Flint area to distribute MDMA in local bars and clubs that promote “college nights” on the Internet and on local campuses. Various MDMA dealers track these promotions and also distribute the drug to student attendees. According to law enforcement officials, the bars and clubs generate increased revenue from drink purchases and cover charges but do not profit directly from drug distribution. In the Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids area, Mexican and Caucasian criminal groups distribute cocaine, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, and methamphetamine at the retail level. Various criminal groups, independent dealers, and abusers distribute diverted pharmaceutical drugs in most areas of the HIDTA region.

Drug-Related Crime

Drug-related violent and property crime often occurs within the HIDTA region as distributors protect their distribution operations, and abusers seek funds to sustain their addictions. Cocaine, heroin, and marijuana distributors often commit violent crimes including assault and homicide to maintain control of local drug markets. Cocaine, heroin, and diverted pharmaceutical abusers often

commit crimes such as retail fraud, burglary, robbery, and theft to obtain drugs or money to purchase drugs. Methamphetamine producers, often Caucasians, steal precursor chemicals, while methamphetamine abusers commit larceny, identity theft, and theft from their parents and/or grandparents to acquire money to purchase the drug. Moreover, some methamphetamine abusers steal credit card applications from mailboxes, complete them with stolen personal information, obtain fraudulent credit cards, and use the credit cards to secure drug funds.

Violence among crack distributors is increasing, particularly in the Flint area, as aspiring, younger crack distributors engage in violent drug and monetary thefts from established dealers. Previously, aspiring distributors worked for established drug distributors as runners or lookouts, eventually becoming distributors themselves. However, many young distributors are now unwilling to “work their way up,” resorting instead to theft and violence to advance their own drug operations. Many young dealers steal drugs from one another; some associate with other drug dealers and study their operations to learn when the dealers will have a large amount of money or drugs, subsequently robbing them. Violent, drug-related “rip-offs” also take place, typically when an established, higher-level dealer purports to have drugs available for sale and, rather than delivering the drugs in exchange for cash from a lower-level dealer, steals the money. Some individuals, fearing recognition and retaliation, murder the drug dealers that they rob. This trend of violence and theft is likely to result in increased retaliatory violence against such drug dealers in the near term.

Abuse

Marijuana is the most widely available and abused illicit drug in the Michigan HIDTA region; however, the distribution and abuse of cocaine are the most significant drug-related concerns to law enforcement officials because of cocaine’s widespread availability, low cost, highly addictive nature, and association with violence. Crack cocaine is more prevalent in urban areas, where it is

abused by African American users; powder cocaine is more prevalent in suburban areas, where it is generally abused by Caucasian and Hispanic users.

Heroin abuse is increasing among young suburban and rural Caucasians, particularly women, as more individuals appear to be engaging in casual use by snorting the drug. In Flint suburban Caucasian abusers travel to the city to purchase quantities that will last 3 to 4 days. Some heroin initiates previously abused prescription narcotics such as OxyContin and switched to heroin after having difficulty obtaining the pharmaceuticals. Many heroin abusers who initiated use of the drug through inhalation or after using prescription narcotics have progressed to intravenous heroin abuse after becoming addicted to the drug. However, some newer abusers have been intimidated by the outbreak of overdoses and deaths associated with heroin/fentanyl combinations and are more cautious when purchasing heroin. SA heroin is the most commonly abused type of heroin in the area, but Southwest Asian heroin, Mexican brown powder and black tar heroin and, occasionally, SEA heroin are abused as well. Mexican heroin is becoming increasingly prevalent in the Grand Rapids area.

Methamphetamine abuse is a concern, particularly in the western HIDTA counties, where the highest levels of abuse occur. Methamphetamine is generally smoked and snorted by Caucasian and Hispanic male abusers, who also produce the drug locally.

Rising MDMA availability in the region has resulted in an increase in the drug's popularity among high school and college students. Large "rave-style" gatherings previously associated with MDMA are rare; however, smaller parties continue to occur within the HIDTA region. Most of MDMA available in the HIDTA region originates in Canada and often contains some methamphetamine.

Diverted pharmaceuticals, particularly fentanyl, hydrocodone, methadone, OxyContin, Vicodin, and Xanax, are obtained by abusers in the HIDTA region through various means, including doctor-shopping, theft, forged prescriptions, copied

or scanned prescriptions, and unscrupulous physicians. Some abusers communicate on the Internet to obtain pharmaceuticals. Others converse in doctors' waiting rooms to identify doctors who write illegal prescriptions; some abusers will provide a doctor's name to other abusers for \$100. Some doctors are increasingly prescribing methadone, sometimes as a replacement for OxyContin to deter law enforcement scrutiny and other times as a result of pressure from drug companies to prescribe methadone for conditions other than opiate addiction. Diverted methadone is a particular concern for public health officials in the region; since the effects of the drug occur at a slower rate than those of other narcotics, abusers sometimes increase the dosage in order to feel the effects more quickly, often leading to an overdose. Diverted Vicodin is available in the HIDTA region at "pill houses" in small amounts as well as in large quantities of 30,000 to 40,000 dosage units.

Fentanyl has become a major concern for law enforcement and public health officials in the HIDTA region after a May 2006 outbreak of fatal and nonfatal overdoses related to clandestinely produced fentanyl mixed with heroin or cocaine. Fentanyl is available in the region as clandestinely produced powder and in prescription patches, lozenge suckers, tablets, and liquid injections. At least 212 fentanyl-related overdose deaths have occurred in the Detroit area since August 2005. Media attention regarding fentanyl-related overdoses has intimidated some drug abusers but caused some to seek out the drug. However, some abusers unwittingly use heroin/fentanyl combinations or cocaine/fentanyl combinations because they are marketed to them as a single drug.

High school and college age students abuse a variety of drugs, including marijuana, heroin, and pharmaceutical drugs. "Pharming parties," typically held at residences, are events at which adolescents and young adults bring a variety of drugs that they have been able to obtain, most often pharmaceuticals. The drugs are placed into a large bowl and mixed. Thereafter, attendees indiscriminately take several drugs from the bowl and simultaneously

ingest them. Young abusers in the region also experiment with various other drugs, including morning glory seeds and dextromethorphan (the abuse of which is known as robotripping⁴). Additionally, young abusers in Detroit are increasingly experimenting with nitrous oxide that is supplied to them by Russian criminal groups.

Illicit Finance

Bulk cash shipments, money services businesses (MSBs), and front businesses are the primary methods used by traffickers to move and launder illicit drug proceeds in the HIDTA region to drug source locations; however, the particular money laundering typology used often depends upon the trafficking group. Mexican and Canada-based DTOs and criminal groups use private and commercial vehicles to transport bulk cash shipments to source locations, often in the same conveyances used to ship drugs into the region. Mexican DTOs also send wire transfers and smurf⁵ money orders through MSBs to move currency to source areas along the Southwest Border and into Mexico. African American DTOs and criminal groups often purchase cash-intensive front businesses such as car washes, clothing stores, and hair and nail salons through which they commingle legitimate and illicit proceeds. Some local African American criminal groups launder money through recording companies. Additionally, law enforcement officials report that members of Black Mafia Family purchase winning lottery tickets as a means to launder illicit proceeds. Middle Eastern criminal groups operate convenience stores and, to a lesser extent, operate wire remittance service businesses to launder illicit proceeds. Some Middle Eastern criminal groups, primarily Chaldean, launder money through third-party checks or become loan sharks for gamblers in order to launder illicit funds. Various lower-level traffickers launder money through casinos. Many retail-level traffickers purchase expensive items, including automobiles and jewelry, to dispose of illicit funds.

Outlook

Local methamphetamine production in the Michigan HIDTA region is likely to further decrease with continued law enforcement pressure, pseudoephedrine sales restrictions, and preventive products (including GloTell and Chemical Lock). In the near term, it is likely that Mexican traffickers will supplant the decline in local production by supplying methamphetamine that they produce in Mexico.

Heroin use among young, middle-class Caucasians, particularly females, is likely to further increase as prescription narcotics abusers substitute heroin when they have difficulty obtaining pharmaceuticals. Compounding this problem will be rising casual heroin use among middle-class Caucasians. These abusers, who typically have stable employment and health insurance, will increasingly seek treatment, potentially straining local drug treatment facilities.

The availability of clandestinely produced fentanyl in the HIDTA region will decrease significantly, a result of the 2006 seizure of a laboratory in Toluca, Mexico, that had produced the fentanyl supplied to the HIDTA region. As a result, the number of overdoses and deaths associated with heroin/fentanyl combinations and cocaine/fentanyl combinations will continue to decrease from their peak in mid-2006. However, if a new source of clandestinely produced fentanyl emerges, traffickers will almost certainly make the drug available in heroin and cocaine markets in the HIDTA region, resulting in a new wave of overdoses and deaths.

Criminal activities currently associated with the Chaldean criminals, particularly drug distribution, fraud, and money laundering, may increase in the Michigan HIDTA region during the coming year because several thousand Iraqi refugees (including some Chaldeans) are likely to relocate to the Detroit area.

4. Robotripping is a street term used to describe the effects produced by the abuse of Robitussin, which contains dextromethorphan.

5. Smurfing is a technique whereby large amounts of cash are divided into smaller amounts to avoid Bank Secrecy Act filing requirements and then deposited or wired.

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Sources

Local, State, and Regional

Detroit Police Department

Flint Police Department

Kalamazoo Valley Enforcement Team

State of Iowa

Office of Drug Control Policy

State of Michigan

Department of Community Health

State Police

Eastern Region Special Investigation Division

Violent Crimes Investigative Section

Field Operations Division

Hometown Security Teams

Intelligence Section

Western Wayne Criminal Investigations

Southeastern Criminal Investigation Division

Federal

Executive Office of the President

Office of National Drug Control Policy

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area

Michigan

The National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws

2007 National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

National Institutes of Health

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Community Epidemiological Work Group

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Coast Guard

Field Intelligence Support Team

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

North Central Field Intelligence Unit

U.S. Department of Justice

Drug Enforcement Administration

Detroit Field Division

Detroit Field Office

Grand Rapids Field Office

Saginaw Field Office
El Paso Intelligence Center
National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System
Office of Diversion Control
Federal Bureau of Investigation
U.S. Attorney's Office
Eastern District of Michigan

U.S. Department of State

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Other

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Hazelden: Drug Abuse Trends in Minneapolis/St. Paul December 2006

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