



# Drug Market Analysis

# 2008

# Ohio

# High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



**NATIONAL DRUG INTELLIGENCE CENTER**  
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**





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



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# 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.

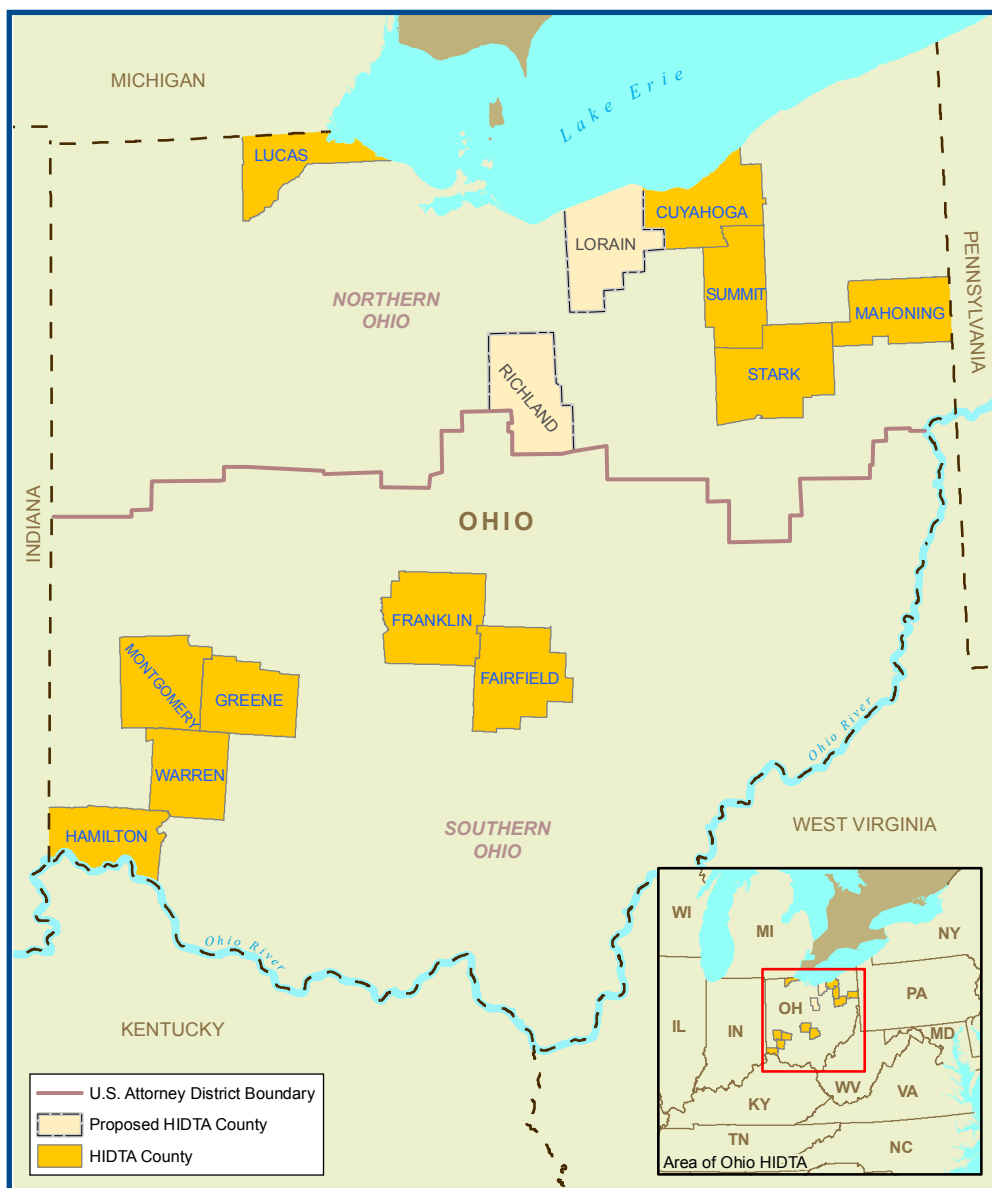


Figure 1. Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.



## STRATEGIC DRUG THREAT DEVELOPMENTS

- Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), the primary transporters and wholesale distributors of illicit drugs in the Ohio HIDTA region, are increasingly bypassing Chicago and Detroit and transporting drugs directly from the Southwest Border to markets in the HIDTA region.
- Mexican DTOs have greatly increased the availability of Mexican brown powder and black tar heroin in southern counties of the Ohio HIDTA region; they are also expanding their heroin distribution networks into northeastern Ohio markets, where Dominican and Puerto Rican traffickers supply South American (SA) heroin.
- Heroin availability and abuse are rising in the Ohio HIDTA region and throughout the state, primarily among young Caucasian adults who previously abused prescription narcotics. This may be attributed to an increased supply of Mexican heroin throughout the HIDTA region and the implementation of Ohio's prescription monitoring program.
- Methamphetamine laboratory seizures in the Ohio HIDTA region decreased over 52 percent from 2005 to 2007, indicating a decline in local methamphetamine production—decreasing supplies of locally produced methamphetamine have not yet been supplanted by methamphetamine produced outside the region, including methamphetamine produced in Mexico.
- African American and Hispanic street gangs have increased their distribution of MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy) in the HIDTA region, particularly in Cleveland and Columbus; treatment providers report that MDMA abuse is rising in Cleveland.

## 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. (See Figure 1 on page 1.) These counties contain more than half of Ohio's population and encompass the nine largest cities in the state. The Ohio HIDTA region is linked to major domestic drug source areas, including Chicago, Detroit, New York City, and the Southwest Border, by numerous interstate highways that often are used by drug traffickers to smuggle illicit drugs into and through the region. Ohio has the fourth-largest interstate highway system and carries the fifth-largest volume of traffic in the nation. Commercial truck traffic in Ohio has grown 90 percent over the last 25 years and is expected to further increase 60 percent by 2020. Large amounts of illicit drugs transported to the area are abused locally; however, some are transshipped to drug markets in neighboring states. Mexican and, to a lesser extent, Dominican and Jamaican DTOs are the predominant transporters of illicit drugs that are distributed in or pass through the area. Additionally, Mexican DTOs are expanding their wholesale and midlevel distribution of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana in the HIDTA region and in neighboring jurisdictions. Significant amounts of illicit drugs are seized annually from such traffickers by law enforcement officials through Ohio HIDTA initiatives. (See Table 1 on page 3.)

## DRUG THREAT OVERVIEW

The distribution and abuse of cocaine, particularly crack cocaine, pose the greatest drug threat to the Ohio HIDTA region because of the drug's highly addictive nature and its association with violent crime and property crime. Despite reporting that cocaine availability had decreased in some areas of Ohio in 2007 (see textbox on page 3), the drug remains widely available and abused throughout the HIDTA region. According to the



**Table 1. Illicit Drugs Seized Through Ohio HIDTA Initiatives, in Kilograms, 2007**

Powder Cocaine	1,131
Crack Cocaine	166
Heroin	23
Khat	306
Marijuana	10,369
MDMA	47,740*
Methamphetamine	1
PCP	16
Diverted Pharmaceuticals <sup>a</sup>	111,530*

Source: Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

\*Dosage units

a. Includes federally scheduled drugs only.

National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2007, 25 of 36 state and local law enforcement respondents in the Ohio HIDTA region identify either crack or powder cocaine as the drug that poses the greatest threat to their jurisdictions. Mexican DTOs are the principal transporters and wholesale distributors of powder cocaine, while African American criminal groups and street gangs are the primary retail distributors of both powder and crack cocaine in the HIDTA region.

The trafficking of heroin and marijuana and the diversion of pharmaceutical drugs also pose a significant threat to the Ohio HIDTA region. SA heroin and Mexican brown powder and black tar heroin are available in the region; however, the availability of Mexican heroin is rising as a result of the increasing role that Mexican DTOs are playing in the transportation and distribution of illicit drugs throughout the region. Commercial-grade Mexican marijuana is widely available and abused throughout the HIDTA region; locally produced marijuana is also available. Diverted pharmaceutical drugs are widely abused throughout the HIDTA region; distributors and abusers typically obtain the drugs through doctor-shopping, prescription forgery, and theft.

The availability and abuse of other drugs, including MDMA, methamphetamine, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), PCP (phencyclidine), khat, and psilocybin, are limited and pose much lesser threats to the HIDTA region than other illicit drugs. MDMA is generally available in urban areas and is increasingly being distributed by street gangs in Columbus and Cleveland. Methamphetamine production in the region has declined significantly since 2005; however, locally produced methamphetamine still accounts for most of the methamphetamine available in the Ohio HIDTA region. The availability of Mexican methamphetamine in the region has not increased to supplant declining local production; the drug is available only in small quantities within Cincinnati, Columbus and, occasionally, Greene County. LSD is available primarily in Franklin and Warren Counties, while PCP is distributed largely by street gangs in Cleveland. Khat is available primarily in Columbus, and psilocybin is prevalent in Fairfield County.

### Decreased Cocaine Availability in Major Drug Markets in 2007

Cocaine availability reportedly decreased from 2006 to 2007 in major markets in the Ohio HIDTA region; however, recent reporting indicates that cocaine availability has returned to more normal levels. During the summer of 2007, some law enforcement officials from Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati reported that cocaine availability had decreased in their jurisdictions and was below 2006 levels; these shortages continued throughout the rest of the year. During the latter half of 2007, the Regional Enforcement Narcotics Unit (RENU) of the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office reported that some cocaine distributors were diluting kilogram quantities of cocaine with inositol, a widely available health food supplement, thereby doubling the amount of product, stretching supplies, and increasing profits. The distributors also sprayed the diluted cocaine with acetone to give it a stronger odor and used a hydraulic press to repackage the drug into kilogram bricks.





## DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS

Mexican DTOs are the principal transporters and wholesale distributors of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana in the Ohio HIDTA region. They are expanding their drug distribution activities throughout the HIDTA region, particularly their distribution of Mexican brown powder and black tar heroin in and from southern HIDTA counties. As a result, Columbus has developed into a regional distribution center for Mexican heroin supplied to markets in Ohio, West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania, and Dayton is emerging as a distribution center for Mexican heroin in southwestern Ohio.

Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Jamaican DTOs also distribute illicit drugs within the HIDTA region, predominantly in northeastern HIDTA counties; they typically transport the drugs they sell from New York City. Dominican and Puerto Rican traffickers distribute SA heroin and cocaine primarily in Cuyahoga County and SA heroin in Mahoning County. Dominican heroin traffickers almost exclusively distribute SA heroin; however, a few Dominican dealers in Cleveland reportedly distribute limited amounts of Mexican brown powder heroin that they obtain from Mexican traffickers in Columbus. Jamaican DTOs are principally active in marijuana distribution; however, they also distribute limited amounts of cocaine.

Local and nationally affiliated street gangs distribute significant quantities of cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and other illicit drugs at the retail level in the Ohio HIDTA region. Street gangs in the region also are involved in a variety of other criminal activities, including burglary, robbery, theft, assault, and homicide; such activities contribute significantly to the overall crime rate. Most street gangs in the Ohio HIDTA region are neighborhood gangs that define their territories based on the street or housing project where they live. However, some nationally affiliated gangs are also present in the HIDTA region, including 18th Street, Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13), and Tiny

### 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 level and midlevel. **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.

Rascal Gangsters in Columbus, and Bloods, Crips, Gangster Disciples, and Latin Kings in Cleveland. Additionally, Hispanic street gangs in Columbus, particularly MS 13, are becoming more organized than in the past. Law enforcement officials report that MS 13 in Columbus operates under a structured leadership, conducts weekly meetings, and collects dues from gang members.

## PRODUCTION

Illicit drug production in the Ohio HIDTA region primarily involves the conversion of powder cocaine into crack, cannabis cultivation, and limited, small-scale methamphetamine production. Large amounts of powder cocaine are converted to crack by African American criminal groups and street gangs, typically at or near local distribution sites in the region. However, African American criminal groups that operate in Columbus reportedly transport crack cocaine to Fairfield County.

Cannabis is cultivated in the Ohio HIDTA region at both indoor and outdoor grow sites; however, indoor grow sites are more common. Most indoor cultivation is conducted by local Caucasian producers, although African American

producers also cultivate cannabis in Mahoning and Warren Counties. Additionally, in the first half of 2007, law enforcement officials in counties surrounding the Cleveland metropolitan area discovered several sophisticated indoor grow sites operated by Vietnamese criminal groups. Indoor cannabis cultivation in the HIDTA region typically occurs in private residences and often employs sophisticated watering and ventilation systems to support the production of high-potency marijuana. Outdoor cannabis grow site operators occasionally use techniques designed to prevent detection by law enforcement, including planting several small plots rather than a single large site. This method was used by growers in Mahoning County, where law enforcement officials discovered approximately 500 marijuana plants that growers had scattered in small plots throughout a field.

Methamphetamine production in the HIDTA region has declined significantly since peaking in 2005, the result of statewide precursor chemical control legislation, aggressive law enforcement efforts, and public awareness campaigns. This decline is evidenced by National Seizure System (NSS) data that reveal a significant decrease in the number of methamphetamine laboratories seized by law enforcement officials in the HIDTA region between 2005 (69) and 2007 (33). (See Table 2.) Most of the methamphetamine laboratory seizures in the HIDTA region occur in Summit County.

## TRANSPORTATION

The extensive interstate highway system in Ohio is routinely exploited by traffickers to transport drugs into and throughout the HIDTA region in private and commercial vehicles. Traffickers primarily use north-south highways such as Interstates 71, 75, and 77 and east-west highways such as I-70 and I-80/90 to transport illicit drugs from distribution centers along the Southwest Border. (See Figure 2 on page 7.) Traffickers also use couriers on commercial airlines and package delivery services to transport illicit drugs to the area.

**Table 2. Methamphetamine Laboratory Seizures by County, Ohio HIDTA, 2003-2008\***

County	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008*
Cuyahoga	0	1	1	1	0	0
Fairfield	3	2	1	0	1	0
Franklin	3	2	2	2	0	0
Greene	3	4	2	3	2	0
Hamilton	2	3	1	2	1	0
Lucas	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mahoning	1	0	0	3	0	0
Montgomery	5	7	5	0	0	0
Stark	4	3	7	2	0	0
Summit	9	45	41	38	26	9
Warren	0	1	9	1	3	0
<b>HIDTA Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>9</b>

Source: National Seizure System data run on 4/29/08.

\*Partial year data as of 4/29/08.

Mexican DTOs are the primary transporters of illicit drugs into the Ohio HIDTA region; they generally transport wholesale quantities of cocaine, marijuana, Mexican brown powder and black tar heroin, and limited amounts of ice methamphetamine. Mexican traffickers are increasingly transporting cocaine and marijuana directly from locations along the Southwest Border to Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown rather than through major drug distribution centers such as Chicago and Detroit, as in previous years. They have also increased the amount of Mexican heroin that they are transporting into the HIDTA region, particularly to Columbus and Dayton. According to the South Central Drug Task Force, Mexican traffickers operating in Columbus typically transport small amounts of heroin in each shipment in contrast to the larger quantities of cocaine and marijuana that they transport. Officials believe that Mexican traffickers use smaller heroin shipments



to avoid the possibility of large losses in the event that shipments are seized by law enforcement.

Dominican, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, and Somali traffickers also transport various drugs into the HIDTA region. Dominican and Puerto Rican DTOs and criminal groups primarily transport SA heroin and cocaine, while Jamaican DTOs transport significant amounts of marijuana. These DTOs and criminal groups transport drugs principally to northeastern Ohio HIDTA markets from New York City, Chicago, and Detroit, using private vehicles. Somali criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of khat into the Columbus area for local consumption, predominantly within the city's Somali community. These groups previously used package delivery services to ship khat into the city; however, law enforcement reporting indicates that they are now transporting the drug into the area from New York City primarily in private vehicles.

Traffickers also transport illicit drugs into the Ohio HIDTA region using couriers on commercial flights, package delivery services, and the mail; however, traffickers use these methods less often than overland transportation and generally only for smaller quantities of drugs. Nonetheless, law enforcement officials recently disrupted the operations of a California-based African American criminal group that used couriers to transport kilogram quantities of cocaine on flights from Los Angeles and Las Vegas to Cleveland. (See [text box](#).) Moreover, traffickers have reportedly used package delivery services to ship pharmaceutical drugs and MDMA to abusers who purchased the drugs from the traffickers over the Internet. For example, abusers in the HIDTA region often acquire pharmaceutical drugs over the Internet and have them shipped through package delivery services; shipments originate in various locations, including California, Florida, Argentina, and Canada. Additionally, the Stark County Violent Crimes Task Force reports that a recent investigation revealed that a local Caucasian distributor had been using the Internet to place orders for MDMA from either China or Canada. He had the packages, each containing thousands of MDMA tablets, mailed to

multiple post office boxes that he set up in Stark County. The MDMA was distributed throughout Stark and Summit Counties and to individuals traveling to the area from cities in southern Ohio, including Columbus.

### Operation Frequent Flyer

In June 2007 an investigation (Operation Frequent Flyer) culminated in a 38-count indictment charging 22 defendants with conspiracy to possess and distribute cocaine, PCP, and marijuana as well as other federal drug and money laundering offenses. According to the indictment, a California-based African American criminal group employed couriers who wore girdles to bodycarry up to 1 kilogram of cocaine on flights from Los Angeles and Las Vegas to Cleveland. Couriers would also take flights to Akron, Columbus, and Detroit and then travel by vehicle to deliver the drugs to Cleveland. The group also transported PCP and marijuana from Los Angeles to Cleveland in private vehicles. During the course of the investigation, officials seized 13 kilograms of cocaine, approximately \$230,000 in cash and bank accounts, and seven firearms.

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

## DISTRIBUTION

Mexican DTOs are the primary wholesale distributors of cocaine, marijuana, and heroin in the Ohio HIDTA region; they have replaced Dominican and African American traffickers as the principal wholesale distributors in certain areas. For example, Mexican DTOs have significantly increased the amount of Mexican heroin that they supply to southern Ohio markets, particularly in Columbus, where they have surpassed Dominicans as the principal wholesale heroin distributors in the city, thereby increasing the availability of Mexican heroin throughout the region. Moreover, Mexican DTOs in Columbus control the distribution of Mexican heroin at all distribution



Figure 2. Ohio HIDTA region transportation infrastructure.

levels. Mexican traffickers have also replaced African American criminal groups as the primary wholesale-level distributors of cocaine, marijuana, and heroin in Dayton. The overall availability of heroin in Dayton has increased significantly; law enforcement officials report that prior to the recent influx of Mexican heroin, kilogram quantities of heroin were not available in the city.

Columbus and Dayton have emerged as regional distribution centers for Mexican brown

powder and black tar heroin supplied to markets throughout Ohio and neighboring states. Columbus is a distribution center for Mexican heroin supplied to markets throughout much of Ohio as well as in West Virginia and western Pennsylvania. Additionally, distributors from other markets often travel to Columbus to purchase Mexican heroin to sell in their home areas. For instance, some heroin distributors in adjoining Fairfield





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County travel to Columbus twice each day, purchasing approximately 75 balloons of heroin per trip; each balloon contains approximately two-tenths of a gram. The Miami Valley Drug Task Force reports that Dayton is a source of supply for heroin available in southwestern Ohio, primarily in Cincinnati and Greene County, and in nearby Indiana cities such as Richmond.

Dominican and Jamaican DTOs also distribute illicit drugs at the wholesale level, principally in northeastern counties of the HIDTA region. Dominican DTOs are the principal wholesale distributors of SA heroin in Cleveland and Youngstown, while Jamaican DTOs distribute marijuana and cocaine in Cleveland and marijuana in Akron and Youngstown. Jamaican DTOs are also active in marijuana distribution in some southern HIDTA markets, including Cincinnati and Warren County.

African American criminal groups and street gangs are the primary retail-level distributors of crack cocaine and marijuana, particularly in urban areas of the Ohio HIDTA region; they are typically supplied by Mexican DTOs. African American criminal groups and street gangs also distribute retail quantities of heroin, powder cocaine, and PCP to varying degrees throughout the HIDTA region. African American street gangs in Cleveland and Columbus are increasing their distribution of MDMA. Most of these street gangs distribute MDMA along with crack cocaine; however, some Cleveland gangs have switched from crack cocaine sales to exclusively distributing MDMA.

Various other groups and independent dealers also serve as retail-level drug distributors in the region. Puerto Rican criminal groups are the primary retail-level distributors of SA heroin in Mahoning County; they typically are supplied by Dominican DTOs based in New York City. The Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Task Force reports that Puerto Rican traffickers sometimes use quality control measures to satisfy customers and maintain their control of the market. For example, one Puerto Rican group that distributes SA heroin with specific package markings has allowed buyers to return poor-quality heroin for a refund or

exchange. Columbus officials report that a few Ghanaian traffickers distribute white heroin (origin unknown), primarily to African American abusers in the city. Hispanic street gangs are active in Columbus, where they distribute cocaine and limited amounts of Mexican ice methamphetamine; they have also emerged as retail-level MDMA distributors. Caucasian independent dealers are the principal distributors of MDMA and diverted pharmaceutical drugs throughout the HIDTA region. Pharmaceutical drugs are typically diverted by distributors and abusers through prescription fraud, doctor-shopping, theft, and pharmacy robberies.

Drug distributors in the Ohio HIDTA region often use cell phones to negotiate transactions and prearrange meetings with customers. South Central Drug Task Force officials in Columbus report that customers there typically call distributors to arrange a meeting place to purchase drugs. Distributors prefer to use prepaid phones because they provide anonymity and can be routinely discarded and replaced because of their low cost. Northern Ohio Law Enforcement Task Force officials indicate that Mexican wholesale distributors in Cleveland are increasingly using text messages to conduct drug transactions.

## DRUG-RELATED CRIME

Law enforcement reporting indicates that cocaine, particularly crack, is the drug that most contributes to violent crime and property crime in the Ohio HIDTA region. According to the NDTs 2007, 24 of the 36 state and local law enforcement respondents in the Ohio HIDTA region identify crack cocaine as the drug most associated with violent and property crime. Crack cocaine distributors commit assaults and homicides to protect drug supplies and distribution territories, while abusers often are involved in shoplifting, robbery, and theft to support their addictions. Heroin abusers also contribute significantly to crime in the region by engaging in shoplifting, identity theft, and burglary to support their addictions. Law enforcement officials in Columbus report that most

crime in the city is associated with drug distribution and abuse. Moreover, they report that home invasion robberies involving the theft of drugs or drug proceeds are increasing in Columbus.

## ABUSE

Marijuana, cocaine, and heroin are the most widely available and abused illicit drugs in the Ohio HIDTA region. Marijuana is the most commonly abused drug in the region; however, the abuse of cocaine and heroin poses a more significant concern to public health and law enforcement officials because of the highly addictive nature of these drugs, the costs associated with publicly funded cocaine and heroin treatment, and the violent and property crime attendant to distribution and abuse of the drugs. According to the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS), the number of cocaine-related treatment admissions in the HIDTA region increased each year from state fiscal year (SFY)<sup>1</sup> 2003 (6,730) to SFY2007 (8,398); treatment providers also report that cocaine remains the drug of choice among abusers in Ohio. (See Table 3.) Heroin abuse is rising in the Ohio HIDTA region, particularly among young Caucasians from suburban areas; heroin-related treatment admissions increased more than 24 percent between SFY2003 (5,549) and SFY2007 (6,906). Additionally, law enforcement officials in Toledo and Fairfield County report that some abusers of prescription opioids are switching to heroin. This switch may be attributed, at least in part, to effects of the Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS),<sup>2</sup> a prescription monitoring program that was fully implemented in October 2006, and to the increasing availability of Mexican heroin, which is typically lower in price, throughout the HIDTA region.

1. Ohio's state fiscal year is July 1 through June 30.

2. The Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS) is a statewide computerized prescription monitoring program that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to physicians, pharmacists, and law enforcement personnel via a secure web site.

**Table 3. Substance Abuse Treatment Admissions, Ohio HIDTA, SFY2003–SFY2007**

Drug	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Marijuana	9,588	9,977	11,402	11,710	11,806
Cocaine	6,730	7,167	8,086	8,390	8,398
Heroin	5,549	5,267	5,991	6,408	6,906
Amphetamine*	150	193	304	363	338

Source: Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services.

\*Amphetamine category includes methamphetamine.

Diverted pharmaceutical drugs are abused at high levels throughout the Ohio HIDTA region. OxyContin is commonly abused in the region despite reports of decreased availability in some areas. Other commonly abused pharmaceutical drugs include Xanax, Vicodin, and Percocet. Additionally, a recent study by the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network reported instances of Seroquel<sup>3</sup> abuse in Cincinnati, Akron, Dayton, and Toledo. Crack abusers in the HIDTA region often use Seroquel to help them “come down” from a high.

Methamphetamine, PCP, and MDMA also are abused to varying degrees throughout the HIDTA region. Treatment data from ODADAS indicate that the number of amphetamine-related (including methamphetamine-related) admissions is significantly lower than the number of admissions for other drugs of abuse in the region. Furthermore, the OSAM Network indicates that most areas of the state report decreasing levels of methamphetamine availability and abuse. PCP is abused primarily by teenagers in Cleveland, where the OSAM Network indicates that abuse of the drug is increasing. MDMA is also abused at low levels in the Ohio HIDTA region; however, officials report increased availability and abuse of the drug in Cleveland and Toledo. In Cleveland, rising MDMA abuse is most likely due to increasing MDMA distribution by street gangs in the city.

3. Seroquel (quetiapine fumarate) is prescribed to treat symptoms of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder but is not scheduled as a controlled substance.



## ILLICIT FINANCE

Drug-related money laundering in the Ohio HIDTA region typically entails the transportation of bulk currency from major metropolitan areas in the state to Mexico. Mexican DTOs are the primary transporters of bulk currency, typically using the same private and commercial vehicles used to transport drugs into the area. Law enforcement officials in Columbus report that Mexican DTOs involved in marijuana and cocaine distribution in the city typically transport large amounts of currency in a single shipment, whereas groups involved in heroin distribution usually transport currency in smaller quantities, corresponding to the typical size of shipments for each drug.

Traffickers operating in the Ohio HIDTA region also launder money through various other means, including purchasing real estate and luxury items, using money services businesses, structuring bank deposits, and commingling drug proceeds with revenue generated by businesses. Retail-level distributors in the HIDTA region typically use their drug proceeds to purchase luxury items such as real estate, vehicles, and jewelry. Traffickers also move drug proceeds to drug source locations using wire transfers through the many money services businesses in the area. Mexican traffickers who distribute drugs at the wholesale level in Montgomery County launder drug proceeds by structuring bank deposits into financial institutions (a practice commonly known as smurfing). These DTOs then provide individuals known as smurfs with multiple contacts in Mexico to whom they transfer small amounts of money. Additionally, drug traffickers in Stark County have used legitimate businesses to launder their drug proceeds. For example, several traffickers operating in the county have provided large sums of money to a local businessman who used the funds much like an interest-free loan. The businessman used the drug proceeds to purchase used vehicles that he later sold at a significant markup, enabling him to quickly return the initial funds to the traffickers and generating a profit for himself. In an

effort to provide legitimacy to the transactions, the money was typically returned to the traffickers in the form of business checks as payment for "consulting fees."

## OUTLOOK

Mexican DTOs will further expand their drug trafficking operations throughout the Ohio HIDTA region, particularly by supplying greater amounts of Mexican heroin to drug markets in southern HIDTA counties. They are also likely to increase the availability of Mexican heroin in northeastern Ohio markets traditionally controlled by Dominican and Puerto Rican traffickers. Mexican DTOs will take advantage of their well-established methods and routes to expand their operations throughout the Ohio HIDTA region.

Heroin availability and abuse will most likely increase in the Ohio HIDTA region, particularly among young suburban Caucasian abusers. The number of heroin abusers will very likely grow as more abusers of prescription opioids switch to heroin in the face of increasing Mexican heroin availability throughout the region. As a result, the significant consequences associated with heroin abuse—including associated crime and treatment costs—will increase in the HIDTA region, enhancing the threat posed by the drug.

MDMA availability and abuse will most likely increase in some areas of the Ohio HIDTA region in the near term. The availability of MDMA is rising in Cleveland and Columbus, where street gangs are becoming more involved in the distribution of the drug. Additionally, street gang distribution of MDMA is likely to broaden the region's MDMA user base beyond traditional Caucasian user groups, particularly to African American and Hispanic communities.



## SOURCES

### Local, State, and Regional

- Cleveland Division of Police
- Columbus Division of Police
- Greene County Agencies for Combined Enforcement Task Force
- Hamilton County Sheriff's Office
  - Regional Enforcement Narcotics Unit
- Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services
  - Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network

### Federal

- Executive Office of the President
  - Office of National Drug Control Policy
    - Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
      - Akron Summit County Drug Task Force
      - Commercial Vehicle Intelligence Initiative
      - Drug Enforcement Administration Youngstown Task Force
      - Mahoning Valley Law Enforcement Task Force
      - Miami Valley Drug Task Force
      - Money Laundering Intelligence Initiative
      - Northeast Ohio Interdiction Task Force
      - Northern Ohio Law Enforcement 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
    - Dayton Resident Office
    - Toledo Resident Office
    - Youngstown Resident Office
  - El Paso Intelligence Center
  - National Seizure System



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