



**U.S. Department of Justice  
National Drug Intelligence Center**



# **Central Valley California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area**



## **Drug Market Analysis 2010**

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## **Drug Market Analysis 2010**

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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## Strategic Drug Threat Developments

The Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region is the principal area in the nation for large-scale production of ice methamphetamine and a significant area for illegal cannabis cultivation operations. It is a national-level distribution and transshipment area for multikilogram quantities of methamphetamine, marijuana, and cocaine and lesser quantities of heroin and MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy) intended for drug markets throughout the United States. Large-scale methamphetamine and marijuana production and the Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) that control these operations pose the most significant drug threats in the region.

The following are strategic drug threat developments in the Central Valley HIDTA region:

- Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are conducting well-organized, large-scale smurfing operations<sup>a</sup> to acquire the necessary pseudoephedrine to sustain major methamphetamine production efforts in the region. Law enforcement operations and pseudoephedrine control legislation have forced these smurfing operations to extend beyond the HIDTA region into southern California and Arizona.
- Illegal cannabis cultivation operations are increasing throughout the Central Valley HIDTA region, particularly in Fresno, Shasta, and Tulare Counties. This situation is driven by the growing demand for high-potency marijuana, high levels of abuse, and the continued exploitation of California's medical marijuana laws by illegal marijuana producers and drug traffickers.
- Cocaine availability has increased in some areas of the region, primarily Fresno, Modesto, Sacramento, and Stockton, as evidenced by declining wholesale prices and rising seizures. Seizures of cocaine by HIDTA initiatives increased 111 percent from 2008 through 2009.

a. Pseudoephedrine smurfing is a method used by some methamphetamine traffickers to acquire large quantities of precursor chemicals. Methamphetamine producers purchase the chemicals in quantities at or below legal thresholds from multiple retail locations, often enlisting the homeless to increase the speed of the operation and the quantity of chemicals acquired.

Figure 1. Central Valley California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area





## HIDTA Overview

The Central Valley HIDTA region consists of 10 counties: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Stanislaus, and Tulare. The region encompasses nearly 32,000 square miles in central California, with a population of approximately 5 million. The region includes metropolitan areas, such as Bakersfield, Fresno, Modesto, Redding, Sacramento, and Stockton, as well as expansive, sparsely populated rural areas. (See Figure 1 on page 2.) The Central Valley HIDTA region is vulnerable to drug trafficking from the Southwest Border because of its proximity to that region. The region's highway infrastructure and direct access to drug sources located in Mexico and Canada enable drug traffickers to transport significant quantities of ice methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and MDMA into and through the HIDTA region for local consumption and to drug markets throughout the country.

## Drug Threat Overview

Ice methamphetamine production and abuse pose the greatest drug threats in the Central Valley HIDTA region. According to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2010,<sup>b</sup> 22 of the 28 law enforcement respondents in the Central Valley HIDTA region identify ice methamphetamine as the drug that poses the greatest threat in their jurisdictions. Methamphetamine is available and abused at high levels throughout the region and is associated with most of the drug-related violent crime and property crime. Additionally, treatment providers in the region have identified methamphetamine as the primary substance of abuse for treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities from 2004 through 2009.

Most of the ice methamphetamine available in the area is transported by Mexican DTOs from source areas in Mexico or produced in local clandestine laboratories in the HIDTA region. Increased methamphetamine availability in the HIDTA region has resulted in a decline in wholesale prices from approximately \$20,000 per pound during the fourth quarter of 2008 to \$14,000 per pound during the fourth quarter of 2009. Central Valley HIDTA initiatives report that methamphetamine seizures increased 29 percent from 2008 through 2009. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1. Central Valley HIDTA Initiative Seizures by Drug, in Kilograms, 2008–2009\***

	Methamphetamine	Marijuana	Cocaine	Heroin
<b>2009*</b>	258	2,090	534	11
<b>2008</b>	200	234	253	30

Source: National Seizure System.

\*Data as of March 15, 2010.

As a result of the Mexican Government's restrictions on chemical precursor imports into the country since 2005, there has been a marked decrease in the availability of pseudoephedrine—an essential precursor in the production of high-potency d-methamphetamine<sup>c</sup>—in Mexico. Mexican DTOs have adapted by finding new foreign sources of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine and by increasing their implementation of non-ephedrine-based methods of methamphetamine production in Mexico. Consequently, some DTOs in Mexico are now producing and distributing lower-potency d,l-methamphetamine using phenylacetic acid, a chemical used to make the methamphetamine precursor chemical P2P (phenyl-2-propanone). In 2010, HIDTA officials reported the emerging availability of d,l-methamphetamine in the region. Although the cost is typically the same for both types, abusers prefer the more potent d-methamphetamine.

Marijuana is widely available and abused in the Central Valley HIDTA region. Marijuana produced in the region is the most prevalent type available, although high-potency marijuana from Canada is also commonly available. All of the 28 state and local law enforcement respondents to the NDTS 2010 report that the drug is highly available in their jurisdictions. The growing demand for high-potency marijuana, high levels of abuse, and the continued exploitation of state medical marijuana laws contribute to the prevalence of cannabis cultivation in the region. Illegal cannabis cultivation operations are especially pervasive and are increasing on public lands and in national forests. In 2009, HIDTA law enforcement officials eradicated almost 1.7 million cannabis plants (approximately 23 percent of all plants seized in California) in the Central Valley HIDTA

b. NDTS data for 2010 cited in this report are as of March 3, 2010. NDTS data cited are raw, unweighted responses from federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies solicited through either NDIC or the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) HIDTA program. Data cited may include responses from agencies that are part of the NDTS 2010 national sample and/or agencies that are part of HIDTA solicitation lists.

c. The drug d-methamphetamine (dextro-methamphetamine) is produced clandestinely, using ephedrine/pseudoephedrine reduction methods. Highly addictive, d-methamphetamine is the most potent, widely abused form of methamphetamine.

region, making the region one of the top cannabis cultivation areas in the nation. (See Table A1 in Appendix A.) Indoor cannabis cultivation is also increasing in the region because of the rising number of large-scale indoor grow sites operated by Canada-based Asian DTOs and Caucasian traffickers who have moved operations indoors to avoid outdoor detection and eradication efforts by law enforcement.

Cocaine availability has increased in some areas of the region, as evidenced by lower wholesale prices, increased seizures, and anecdotal law enforcement reporting. Central Valley HIDTA officials report that the price of powder cocaine decreased from \$20,000 per kilogram during the fourth quarter of 2008 to approximately \$16,000 per kilogram during the fourth quarter of 2009. Law enforcement officials report increased cocaine availability in Fresno, Modesto, Sacramento, and Stockton, and 20 of the 28 NDTs 2010 respondents in the region report that powder cocaine availability is moderate to high in their jurisdictions. Additionally, law enforcement officials in Sacramento and Stockton report that cocaine trafficking and abuse are most often associated with violent crime in their jurisdictions. Cocaine seizures from HIDTA initiatives increased approximately 111 percent from 2008 through 2009. (See Table 1 on page 3.)

Controlled prescription drugs (CPDs), heroin, and other illicit drugs pose lower threats in the region. CPDs are available, with abuse occurring among all demographic groups. Distributors and abusers commonly divert CPDs through doctor-shopping, drug thefts, prescription forgeries, and Internet purchases. The most commonly abused CPDs are prescription opioid pain relievers.<sup>d</sup> Treatment providers in the region report that some prescription opioid abusers are switching to heroin as they increase their tolerance to prescription opioids and seek a more euphoric high, and when the availability of heroin is greater than that of prescription opioids. Public treatment admissions for heroin abuse totaled 5,296 in 2009, ranking the drug behind only methamphetamine (11,339) and marijuana (7,047). (See Figure 4 on page 9.) Mexican black tar heroin is the most available type of heroin in the area. It is abused most often in metropolitan areas of the region, primarily in Fresno and Sacramento. Much of the MDMA available in the region is manufactured in Canada and transported into the Central Valley for abuse or further transport to southern California. GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), ketamine, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), PCP (phencyclidine), psilocybin, and Rohypnol (flunitrazepam) are also distributed and abused to varying degrees throughout the region.

## Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups pose the greatest organizational drug threat in the Central Valley HIDTA. They are the principal illicit drug producers, transporters, and wholesale distributors in the region. Mexican DTOs dominate methamphetamine and outdoor marijuana production operations throughout the area and regularly transport wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine, marijuana, powder cocaine, and black tar heroin from Mexico into the region for distribution. Mexican DTOs typically focus their efforts on wholesale-level sales and supply small Hispanic, African American, and Asian criminal groups that distribute the drugs at the midlevel and retail level.

Asian DTOs (typically ethnic Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese) operate throughout the HIDTA region and are the dominant producers of high-potency indoor-grown marijuana. Asian DTOs also transport wholesale quantities of high-potency marijuana and MDMA, including MDMA combined with BZP (N-benzylpiperazine) and TFMPP (1-(3-trifluoromethylphenyl)piperazine), from Canada into the region. Members of Asian DTOs typically restrict involvement in their drug trafficking operations to individuals of similar race/ethnicity and familial affiliation; however, they sometimes work with other groups, primarily criminal groups within the Indo-Canadian community, to transport drugs across the U.S.–Canada border. For example, in November 2009, the Fresno Police Department seized 108,000 MDMA tablets, the largest MDMA seizure in the department's history, from an Indo-Canadian member of a criminal group that had smuggled the drugs from Canada to the Central Valley HIDTA region.

Street gangs and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) distribute illicit drugs at the midlevel and retail level. These gangs are extremely violent as they establish or maintain control of their drug trafficking operations and are involved in other criminal activities, including shootings, carjackings, and armed robberies. Hispanic street gangs, affiliates of Sureños and Norteños gangs, primarily distribute methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin. African American street gang members, primarily affiliates of Bloods and Crips, distribute crack cocaine and marijuana in the HIDTA region. Asian street gangs dominate distribution of MDMA and high-potency marijuana at the retail level. Members of OMGs, most notably Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC), distribute powder cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana at the midlevel and retail level.

d. Opioid pain relievers include codeine, fentanyl (Duragesic, Actiq), hydromorphone (Dilaudid), meperidine (Demerol), morphine (MS Contin), oxycodone (OxyContin), methadone (Dolophine), and hydrocodone combinations (Vicodin, Lortab, and Lorcet).

## Production

The Central Valley HIDTA region is the primary methamphetamine production area, not only in California but also in the United States. In 2009, 50 percent of all methamphetamine laboratories seized in California were located in the Central Valley HIDTA region. (See Table 2.) In addition, 7 of the 13 superlabs<sup>e</sup> seized in California during 2009 were located in the Central Valley. The majority of these laboratories were controlled by Mexican DTOs and located in rural areas—typically on rented property (usually farms) or remote public lands. Although laboratory seizures in the region have declined over the last 5 years as a result of regulatory efforts to control precursor chemicals, the region remains a prominent production area. In 2005, the government of Mexico (GOM) began implementing progressively increasing restrictions on the importation of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine used in methamphetamine production. By 2007, the GOM had announced a prohibition on importing these chemicals into Mexico for 2008 and a ban on the use of both chemicals beginning in 2009. As a result, Mexican DTOs relocated some of their production operations to the Central Valley region.

The environmental damage caused by the disposal of chemicals and chemical waste is substantial in the region. More than half of the state's remediation costs for contaminated methamphetamine production sites are incurred in the Central Valley. In 2009, cleanup of these laboratories cost the state more than \$400,000, which accounted for approximately 53 percent of state expenditures to remediate methamphetamine laboratories and dumpsites.

**Table 2. Methamphetamine Clandestine Laboratory Removals in Central Valley HIDTA Counties, 2005–2009**

Year	Items Seized	Fresno	Kern	Kings	Madera	Merced	Sacramento	San Joaquin	Shasta	Stanislaus	Tulare	HIDTA Total	CA State Total
2005	Abandonments	17	3	0	5	92	5	22	1	96	10	251	316
	Laboratories	7	3	0	3	25	8	14	2	25	3	90	326
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>642</b>
	Cleanup Costs	\$39,298	\$13,468	NA	\$15,234	\$231,371	\$22,407	\$69,081	\$4,572	\$264,773	\$29,984	\$690,188	\$1,265,784
2006	Abandonments	26	0	1	3	41	3	10	1	75	9	169	224
	Laboratories	4	2	0	0	10	10	21	3	10	8	68	252
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>476</b>
	Cleanup Costs	\$64,646	\$3,281	\$2,434	\$7,217	\$99,400	\$25,609	\$64,672	\$7,286	\$146,106	\$34,704	\$455,355	\$1,005,257
2007	Abandonments	30	2	1	12	73	0	6	0	22	5	151	189
	Laboratories	5	6	2	1	2	6	8	2	5	2	39	163
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>352</b>
	Cleanup Costs	\$68,313	\$17,630	\$3,831	\$26,950	\$157,883	\$9,738	\$20,925	\$2,419	\$49,693	\$12,014	\$369,396	\$772,971
2008	Abandonments	9	5	0	14	68	1	8	1	43	8	157	190
	Laboratories	5	1	0	3	12	3	8	0	16	3	51	184
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>374</b>
	Cleanup Costs	\$25,703	\$24,327	NA	\$54,108	\$262,738	\$7,778	\$42,677	\$1,280	\$136,934	\$29,122	\$584,667	\$1,026,767
2009	Abandonments	6	3	0	6	32	3	11	2	22	2	87	114
	Laboratories	1	2	0	0	4	4	3	4	11	3	32	124
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>238</b>
	Cleanup Costs	\$15,625	\$12,624	NA	\$26,690	\$119,277	\$27,115	\$47,914	\$12,393	\$130,750	\$18,588	\$410,976	\$775,298

Source: California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

\*An abandonment is either a dumpsite or an incomplete laboratory and can include items such as chemical containers, glassware, and equipment.

NA—Not applicable.

e. Superlabs are laboratories capable of producing 10 or more pounds of methamphetamine in a single production cycle.

Since the enactment of the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005,<sup>f</sup> it has been difficult for methamphetamine producers to acquire pseudoephedrine locally. As such, Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are conducting well-organized, large-scale smurfing operations to acquire the necessary pseudoephedrine to maintain major production operations in the region. Law enforcement investigations and pseudoephedrine control legislation have forced these operations to extend well beyond the HIDTA region into southern California and Arizona.

The Central Valley HIDTA region is one of the most significant cannabis cultivation areas in the United States. (See [Tables A1 and A2 in Appendix A.](#)) According to Central Valley HIDTA officials, cannabis cultivation in the region is increasing, with law enforcement continuing to find and eradicate large-scale outdoor and indoor grows. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program data reveal that eradication statewide in California increased 41 percent from more than 5.3 million plants in 2008 to more than 7.5 million plants in 2009. The Central Valley HIDTA accounted for almost 1.7 million of the plants seized in 2009, approximately 23 percent of all the plants seized statewide. (See [Tables A1 and A2 in Appendix A.](#))

The optimal climate and growing conditions that support the region's agricultural industry also sustain the highly lucrative illicit outdoor cannabis cultivation operations conducted by Mexican DTOs and, to a lesser extent, Asian criminal groups. The area's diverse migrant worker population, which is necessary for central California's agricultural industry, also provides a heightened degree of anonymity for drug traffickers. Additionally, Mexican DTOs and criminal groups increasingly exploit the remoteness of the region's national forests to conduct large-scale cannabis cultivation operations. (See [Figure 2 on page 7.](#)) According to the U.S. Forest Service, the Los Padres, Sequoia, Shasta-Trinity, and Sierra National Forests consistently rank among the top 10 national forests for eradication of cannabis plants on National Forest System lands.

### Operation SOS in Fresno County, California

Operation SOS (Save Our Sierras) was a 3-week mission in Fresno County to eradicate cannabis, investigate cultivation organizations, and restore public and private lands in the area. Operation SOS focused almost entirely on targeting existing grow sites on public lands in Fresno County, which resulted in the eradication of 401,008 cannabis plants and the seizure of 32 weapons, 46.25 pounds of processed marijuana, \$40,972 in U.S. currency, and 3 vehicles. In addition, 89 individuals were arrested. In connection with Operation SOS, in September 2009, DEA announced the indictment of a leader of an organization who was responsible for the cultivation of more than 49,000 plants in the Sierra National Forest. According to DEA, the sites had the potential to cause extensive damage to the vegetative resources and the watershed of the Central Valley. This operation was conducted by the Central Valley Marijuana Investigation Team, with cooperation from the Fresno County Sheriff's Office, California National Guard, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities.

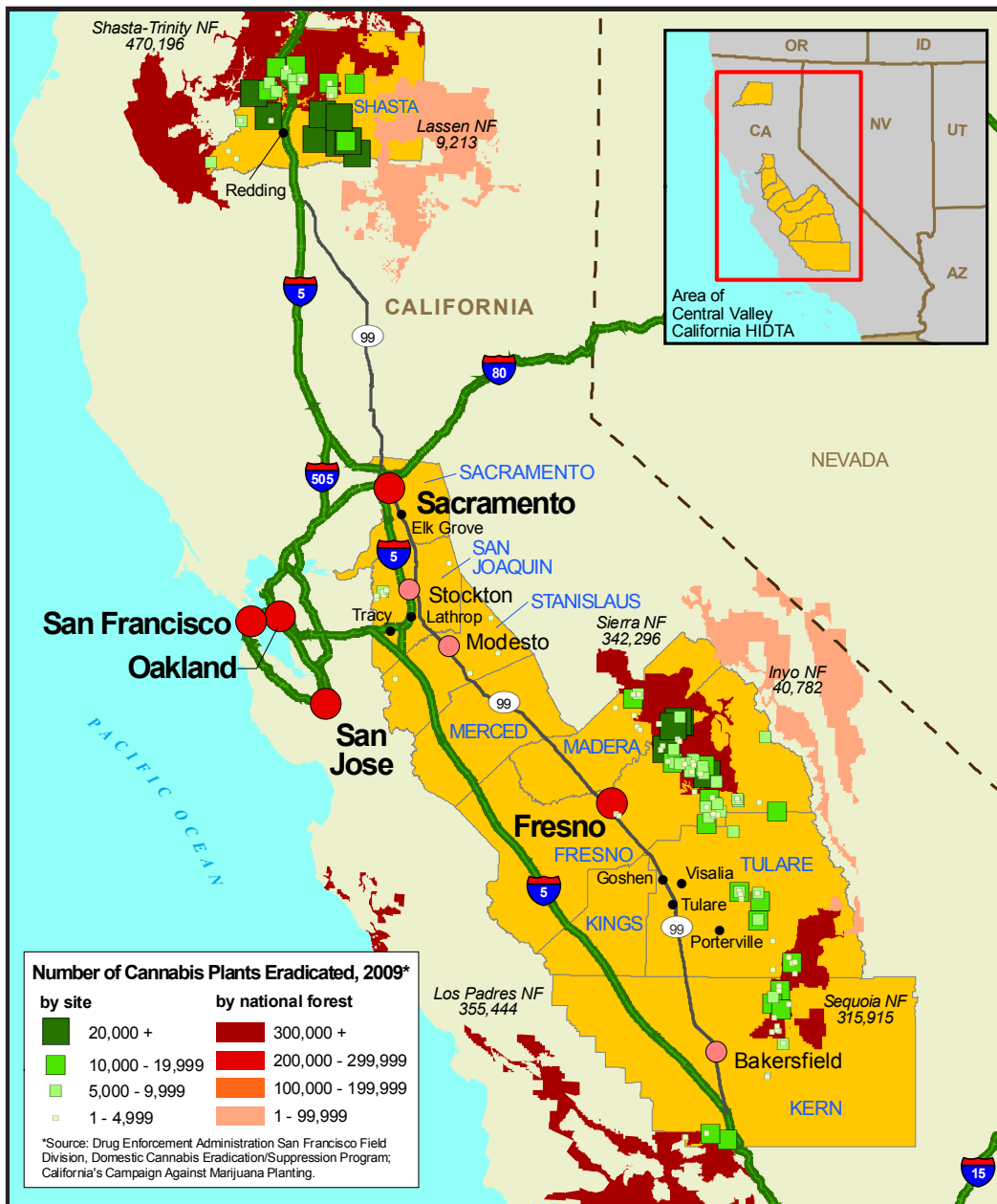
Source: Drug Enforcement Administration.

Outdoor cannabis cultivation, particularly on public lands, is causing increasing environmental damage. According to the U.S. Forest Service and California's Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP), law enforcement officers are increasingly encountering contaminated and altered watersheds, the clear-cutting of native vegetation, discarded garbage and nonbiodegradable material, and dumpsites of highly toxic insecticides, chemical repellants, and other poisons. These toxic chemicals enter and contaminate ground water, pollute watersheds, kill fish and other wildlife, and eventually enter residential water supplies. Redirecting natural water sources leads to erosion and impacts native vegetation. The Office of National Drug Control Policy reports that for every acre of forest planted with cannabis, 10 acres are damaged by these toxic chemicals.

Asian criminal groups also maintain some small-scale outdoor cultivation sites in the region, but unlike Mexican DTOs, they typically cultivate cannabis amidst other, legitimate crops. These groups, primarily Hmong, Laotian, Thai, and Cambodian, often cultivate cannabis plants interspersed with legitimate crops such as strawberries. Many of these individuals work in the local agricultural industry.

f. The Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005 requires all states to have regulated sellers maintain logbooks and set time-sensitive quantity limits on products containing ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, or phenylpropanolamine. Smurfers typically buy cold medicine containing pseudoephedrine in different stores, often using false or stolen identification, in accordance with the pseudoephedrine limit of 3.6 grams per purchase with a maximum allotment of 9 grams per month.



**Figure 2. Cannabis Plants Eradicated in the Central Valley HIDTA, by County, 2009**

The indoor cultivation of cannabis is widespread throughout the HIDTA region; since 2007, law enforcement officials have increasingly been discovering indoor grows. Indoor cannabis cultivators typically use multiple residences, including rental properties, to establish indoor grow operations. They use hydroponic technology, advanced lighting, and irrigation systems. Indoor growers prefer the controlled environment, which allows them to produce high-potency marijuana and avoid law enforcement aerial surveillance and outdoor eradication efforts. They are also able to achieve higher profits from the year-round cultivation season, since a new crop can be harvested every 90 days.

## Transportation

The Central Valley HIDTA region's proximity to illicit drug sources and its multifaceted transportation infrastructure enable traffickers to transport significant quantities of illicit drugs into the region and throughout the nation. Major highways in the region, such as Interstate 5, provide traffickers with direct access to drug source areas in California, Mexico, and Canada. (See Figure 1 on page 2.) Methamphetamine and marijuana produced within the HIDTA are regularly transported from the region in private and commercial vehicles, primarily on I-80, to drug markets throughout the United States. Drug traffickers

typically use vehicles with complex fabricated compartments that are often welded into body frames, gas tanks, and passenger areas and require several steps to open, using electronic or magnetic switches. Moreover, law enforcement officials in Shasta County report that transporters often use more than one vehicle when moving drugs—one to carry the drugs and another to distract law enforcement.

## Distribution

The Central Valley HIDTA region is a national- and regional-level distribution center for ice methamphetamine and marijuana produced in the region as well as ice methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin smuggled from Mexico into the United States. Mexican DTOs are the primary wholesale distributors of drugs in the region, typically using stash sites located in private residences, warehouses, and storage facilities in cities and towns throughout the region. Mexican DTOs use the area as a base of operations for illicit drug distribution to markets throughout the United States. For example, Central Valley HIDTA officials estimate that approximately 85 percent of the methamphetamine produced in the region is transported from the Central Valley to other states, especially to major distribution areas such as Atlanta, Georgia, and Chicago, Illinois.

Street gangs, prison gangs, and OMGs operating in the HIDTA region distribute illicit drugs to their counterparts in cities located throughout the country to capitalize on the higher profits that can be made in those cities. Various traffickers in the area, including Asian DTOs, Caucasian criminal groups, and independent dealers, distribute marijuana produced in the Central Valley and Canadian high-potency marijuana to other areas of the country in order to meet demand for the drug.

## Drug-Related Crime

Ice methamphetamine trafficking and abuse are the leading contributors to violent crimes and property crimes in the Central Valley HIDTA region. In fact, 25 of the 28 state and local law enforcement officials responding to the NDTs 2010 report that methamphetamine is the drug that most contributes to violent crime in their jurisdictions; 26 respondents report the same for property crime. Law enforcement officials report that most incidents of assault, armed robbery, and homicide that occur in the region are perpetrated by members of DTOs, criminal groups, and street gangs in the course of their drug trafficking operations. Property crimes such as burglary, identity theft, and property theft are committed by methamphetamine abusers. In addition, a large portion of domestic violence and child neglect incidents are methamphetamine-related. For example, law enforcement officials report that children of methamphetamine abusers often live in unsanitary conditions and are sometimes exposed to the toxic chemicals used in the methamphetamine production process, resulting in long-term health problems. In 2009, the Fresno Methamphetamine Task Force placed 28 children into protective custody under their drug-endangered children program.

Violence associated with outdoor cannabis cultivation is also a significant threat in the region. HIDTA officials report that individuals at cannabis cultivation sites are often armed to protect their crops from law enforcement and rival growers. (See [Figure 3 on page 9.](#)) Because cannabis crop tenders are often ready to defend these sites, these cultivation operations represent a threat to the safety of law enforcement officers and unwitting visitors, hunters, and hikers.

## Abuse

Public treatment admissions in the Central Valley HIDTA region remain high despite preliminary 2009 data showing decreases, the exception being the “other drug” category.<sup>g</sup> According to the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, methamphetamine was identified more often than any other drug as the primary substance of abuse from 2004 through 2009. In 2009, approximately 40 percent of individuals admitted to public treatment centers in the HIDTA region were admitted for methamphetamine abuse. (See [Figure 4 on page 9.](#)) Treatment admissions for marijuana abuse are also high but are not considered to be as significant as those for methamphetamine abuse, the effects of which are much more difficult to treat. Cocaine is also abused throughout the Central Valley, but to a lesser extent.

g. Preliminary data run on April 1, 2010.

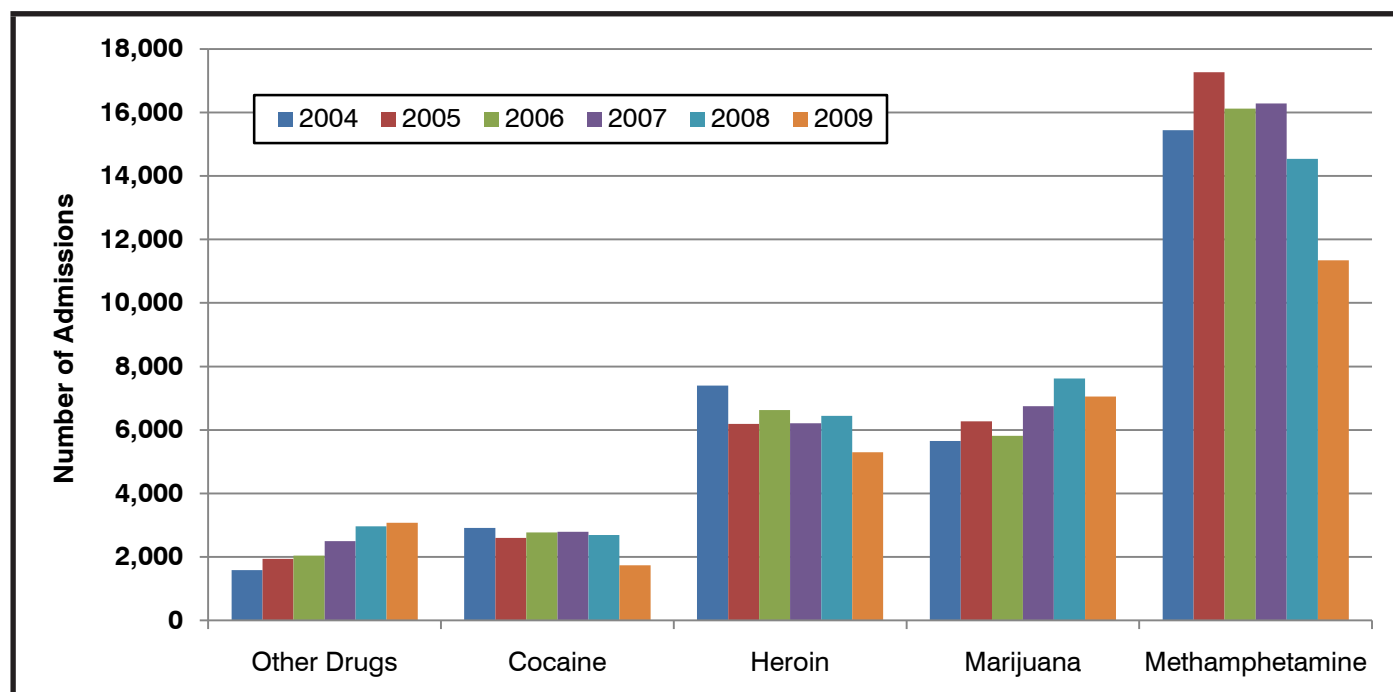
Treatment center admissions for other drugs have steadily increased, nearly doubling from 2004 to 2009, while other admissions for major drug categories fluctuated during the same time frame. (See Figure 4.) Oxycodones are among the most commonly abused CPDs in the region; however, heroin abuse may increase as some oxycodone abusers find it easier to obtain heroin, according to treatment professionals in the area. Hydrocodones, benzodiazepines, and carisoprodol are also commonly abused in the region.

**Figure 3. Armed Cannabis Growers in Fresno County**



Source: Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

**Figure 4. Central Valley California HIDTA Drug Treatment Admissions, 2004–2009**



Source: California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, Office of Applied Research and Analysis.

## Illicit Finance

Traffickers move and launder illicit drug proceeds generated in the HIDTA region through various methods. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups generally transport cash in bulk to southwestern states, where the funds are typically aggregated and eventually smuggled to Mexico. Once in Mexico, bulk cash is often deposited into a Mexican bank or a *casa de cambio* (exchange house) and subsequently repatriated to the United States. Asian DTOs and criminal groups also use bulk cash smuggling to move their illicit proceeds out of the region; they typically transport illicit proceeds to Canada in private vehicles through POEs along the U.S.–Canada border. According to the NDTs 2010, 22 of the 28 law enforcement respondents in the Central Valley HIDTA region report that bulk cash smuggling is the most common method used to move drug proceeds. In 2009, more than \$3.5 million in cash was seized by law enforcement officials in the region, a 49 percent increase over the approximately \$2.4 million seized in 2008. Other money laundering methods used by DTOs in the region include money services businesses, cash-intensive businesses, and real estate purchases.

## Outlook

The Central Valley HIDTA region has strategic drug trafficking and marketing significance for Mexican DTOs as a national-level production, transportation, and distribution center for illicit drugs. The dominance that Mexican DTOs exert over wholesale ice methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin distribution in the region is not expected to be challenged by other DTOs in the near term. Asian DTOs and criminal groups will expand their influence and operations in the region, particularly the smuggling and nationwide distribution of high-potency marijuana and MDMA.

The trafficking and abuse of ice methamphetamine will not diminish in the near term and will remain the most significant drug threat. Demand for the drug is high, and Mexican DTOs in the area have controlled production and distribution operations for many years. Point-of-sale restrictions placed on pseudoephedrine will continue to prompt local methamphetamine producers to expand their smurfing activities outside the HIDTA region to avoid law enforcement scrutiny and obtain sufficient supplies of the precursor.

The availability of high-potency marijuana in the region is increasing, and there are no indications that this will change in the near term. Mexican DTOs will increase their use of public lands in remote areas of the region for outdoor cultivation, using weapons to protect their grow sites. Indoor cannabis cultivators, including many illegal cultivators who claim protection under the state's medical marijuana law, will continue to expand their operations by increasing the number and size of indoor grow sites.



## Appendix A. Tables

**Table A1. Cannabis Plants Seized in the Central Valley HIDTA Region, 2005–2009**

County	Outdoor Plants					Indoor Plants				
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Fresno</b>	137,600	85,761	181,407	172,302	389,229	0	7,160	2,656	1,340	1,834
<b>Kern</b>	61,726	44,510	146,586	159,336	202,936	1,349	196	998	40	95
<b>Kings</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Madera</b>	12,159	8,576	37,652	0	131,022	0	0	0	0	305
<b>Merced</b>	2,145	1,949	58,537	22,266	91,114	1,393	628	299	798	1,714
<b>Sacramento</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	16,901	0	0	0
<b>San Joaquin</b>	11,944	6,207	9,517	16,560	28,253	18	7,600	5,944	2,262	2,895
<b>Shasta</b>	218,384	237,299	356,462	407,386	628,255	24	12	64	284	1,119
<b>Stanislaus</b>	21,962	2,751	0	0	4,576	2,561	3,664	1,636	0	2,272
<b>Tulare</b>	157,441	65,912	330,621	474,215	211,710	69	26	365	96	709
<b>Total</b>	<b>623,361</b>	<b>452,965</b>	<b>1,120,782</b>	<b>1,252,065</b>	<b>1,687,095</b>	<b>5,414</b>	<b>36,187</b>	<b>11,962</b>	<b>4,820</b>	<b>10,943</b>

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

**Table A2. Top-Ranking States for the Number of Cannabis Plants Eradicated, 2005–2009**

2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
<b>California</b>	2,011,277	<b>California</b>	2,995,285	<b>California</b>	4,951,976	<b>California</b>	5,322,053	<b>California</b>	7,519,580
<b>Kentucky</b>	510,502	<b>Kentucky</b>	558,756	<b>Kentucky</b>	492,615	<b>Washington</b>	580,415	<b>Washington</b>	680,923
<b>Tennessee</b>	440,362	<b>Tennessee</b>	483,271	<b>Washington</b>	295,573	<b>Tennessee</b>	539,370	<b>Tennessee</b>	447,167
<b>Hawaii</b>	255,113	<b>Hawaii</b>	201,100	<b>Oregon</b>	277,766	<b>Kentucky</b>	353,170	<b>Kentucky</b>	333,236
<b>Washington</b>	136,165	<b>Washington</b>	144,181	<b>Tennessee</b>	178,322	<b>West Virginia</b>	146,553	<b>Oregon</b>	257,850
<b>Arizona</b>	113,523	<b>Oregon</b>	113,608	<b>Hawaii</b>	139,089	<b>North Carolina</b>	105,200	<b>West Virginia</b>	224,130

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

Note: In 2009, a total of 10,394,642 cannabis plants were seized in the United States.



## Sources

### Local, State, and Regional

Delano Police Department  
     Narcotics Division  
     Gangs Unit  
 Fresno County Sheriff's Office  
 Fresno Police Department  
     Special Investigations Department  
 Kern County Sheriff's Department  
     Gang Unit  
     Major Narcotics  
 Modesto Police Department  
 Sacramento County Sheriff's Office  
     Multi-Jurisdictional Methamphetamine Enforcement Team  
     Violence Suppression and Narcotics Investigations Division  
 Sacramento Police Department  
 Stanislaus County Sheriff's Office  
     Stanislaus Drug Enforcement Agency  
 State of California  
     Campaign Against Marijuana Planting  
     Criminal Intelligence Bureau  
     Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs  
         Office of Applied Research and Analysis  
     Department of Justice  
         California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement  
         Central Valley Marijuana Investigative Team  
     Department of Public Health  
         California Alcohol and Drug Data System  
     Department of Toxic Substances Control  
     National Guard  
         Drug Demand Reduction Group  
     Office of the Attorney General  
     Secretary of State

### Federal

Executive Office of the President  
     Office of National Drug Control Policy  
         High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area  
             Central Valley  
                 Fresno Methamphetamine Task Force  
                 Investigative Support Center  
                 Sacramento Area Intelligence Narcotic Task Force  
                 Southern Tri-County Central Valley California HIDTA Task Force  
                 Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced Task Force  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture  
     U.S. Forest Service  
         National Forest System  
 U.S. Department of Commerce  
     U.S. Census Bureau

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
     U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
 U.S. Department of Justice  
     Criminal Division  
         Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force  
     Drug Enforcement Administration  
         Diversion Program  
         Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program  
     El Paso Intelligence Center  
         National Seizure System  
     San Francisco Field Division  
 U.S. Department of the Treasury  
     Financial Crimes Enforcement Network

### Other

New Leaf Treatment Center, Lafayette, California

Questions and comments may be directed to  
Pacific/West Central Unit, Regional Threat Analysis Branch

**National Drug Intelligence Center**

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LEO <https://www.leo.gov/http://leowcs.leopriv.gov/lesig/ndic/index.htm>

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