

U.S. Department of Justice National Drug Intelligence Center



Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



Drug Market Analysis 2010



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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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Strategic Drug Threat Developments

The trafficking and abuse of methamphetamine are the greatest drug threats to the Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region. Illicit cannabis cultivation and subsequent marijuana trafficking and abuse are significant and everpresent drug threats as well. Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) pose the greatest organizational drug threat and are responsible for the transportation and distribution of most of the ice methamphetamine available in the Hawaii HIDTA region.

The following are significant strategic drug threat developments in the Hawaii HIDTA region:

- Mexican DTOs are expanding their ice methamphetamine distribution operations in the region, leading to increased availability and lower wholesale-level prices for the drug. Ice methamphetamine is the foremost drug concern in the region because abuse of the drug is associated with the majority of treatment admissions and drug-related crime in the state. Increased ice methamphetamine availability will result in continued high levels of abuse, violent crime, and property crime.
- Illegal cannabis cultivation operations are pervasive throughout the Hawaii HIDTA region, particularly on the Big Island and Maui. This situation is a serious drug threat that is driven by the growing demand for high-potency marijuana, high levels of abuse, and the continued exploitation of Hawaii's medical marijuana laws by illegal marijuana producers and drug traffickers.
- Restrictions placed upon cannabis eradication efforts on the Big Island resulted in a 54 percent decrease in the number plants seized at outdoor grows in the state from 2008 through 2009. In 2008, the Hawaii County Council voted not to accept federal funding for state and local law enforcement eradication programs. (See text box on page 5.) Hampered by limited aerial surveillance operations, law enforcement eradication of outdoor plants is expected to continue to decline or remain at low levels.
- Over the last year, HIDTA officials have reported increased abuse of other drugs, including the hallucinogen *Salvia divinorum*, the stimulant mephedrone (4-MMC), and synthetic cannabinoids, commonly referred to as "K2" and "Spice." These "legal highs" are typically sold online and in head shops, smoke shops, and health food stores. Because these products are relatively new, they have yet to be regulated, and reliable information about their effects is not available. The Hawaii State Department of Public Safety, Narcotics Enforcement Division (NED) requested emergency scheduling of *Salvia divinorum* in August 2009 and is in the process of introducing similar restrictions for mephedrone and synthetic cannabinoids.

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HIDTA Overview

The Hawaii HIDTA region encompasses the eight main islands^a and a 1,500-mile chain of islets that span more than 6,400 square miles in the north central Pacific Ocean. (See Figure 1.) Hawaii is located approximately 2,500 miles from the West Coast of the United States and is situated between the continental United States and the Pacific countries of Oceania.^b Regionally, Hawaii is a gateway to Pacific Rim^c countries and Asia. International airports and maritime ports as well as a developed transportation infrastructure facilitate not only the efficient flow of legitimate commerce but also the transshipment and distribution of illicit drugs and drug proceeds into and through the state. Hawaii has a total population of more than 1.28 million, approximately 70 percent of whom reside in the city of Honolulu on the island of Oahu. Honolulu is Hawaii's principal port of entry (POE) for travelers, mail, and cargo. The movement of passengers and commodities is facilitated by an international airport, an international postal facility, and two of the state's busiest commercial harbors. The diverse, largely transient (tourist) population in the HIDTA region provides a large customer base and a heightened

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a. The eight main islands are Hawaii (the Big Island), Kahoolawe, Kauai, Lanai, Maui, Molokai, Niihau, and Oahu.

b. Oceania, with an estimated population of 3.1 million, is a region consisting of Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, as well as the thousands of coral atolls and volcanic islands in the South Pacific Ocean.

c. "Pacific Rim" is a political and economic term used to designate the countries at the edges of the Pacific Ocean and the various island nations within the region (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam).

degree of anonymity for various drug traffickers and criminal groups operating in the state. Consequently, Honolulu is the primary transshipment point for drugs and drug proceeds to and through the region and drives the drug situation on each of the other populated islands of the state.

Drug Threat Overview

Ice methamphetamine trafficking and abuse pose the most significant drug threat to the Hawaii HIDTA region because of high levels of abuse and the drug's association with much of the violent and property crime in Hawaii. Methamphetamine is identified more often than any other drug, including alcohol, as the primary substance of abuse for treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Hawaii. Four of the five state and local law enforcement agencies in the region that responded to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2010^d identify methamphetamine as the greatest drug threat to their jurisdictions.

Mexican DTOs are expanding their methamphetamine distribution operations into the region, leading to increased availability and lower wholesale-level prices, which decreased from \$25,000–\$50,000 per pound in 2008 to \$28,000–\$42,000 per pound in 2009. HIDTA law enforcement officers seized more than 245 pounds of ice methamphetamine in 2009, a significant increase from the 90 pounds seized in 2008. Most of the ice methamphetamine available in the area is smuggled from Mexico via the mainland's West Coast and from traditional production areas in California. High-potency d-methamphetamine^e is the predominant type of the drug available in Hawaii; however, HIDTA officials reported several seizures of lower-potency d,l-methamphetamine^f in 2009, particularly on the Big Island.

Illicit cannabis cultivation along with marijuana trafficking are significant and ever-present drug threats to the region. Illegal cannabis cultivation operations are pervasive throughout the Hawaii HIDTA region, particularly on the Big Island and Maui. This situation is driven by the growing demand for high-potency marijuana, high levels of abuse, and the continued exploitation of Hawaii's medical marijuana laws by illegal marijuana producers and drug traffickers. Current illicit cannabis cultivation is unable to meet rising demand for high-potency marijuana, and HIDTA officials report that increasing amounts of the drug are produced in California, Oregon, Washington, and Canada and regularly transported into the region by Mexican and Asian DTOs and local Pacific Islander and Caucasian criminal groups. In 2009, HIDTA law enforcement officers eradicated nearly 65,000 pounds of marijuana with an estimated wholesale market value of more than \$311 million.

Funding and operating limitations placed on cannabis eradication programs, particularly on the Big Island, have resulted in an overall decrease in the number of plants seized from outdoor grows. (See text box on page 5.) The number of outdoor plants eradicated in the state fell from 131,355 in 2007 to 102,398 in 2008 and 47,159 in 2009. This situation has prompted illicit growers relocating from the West Coast of the U.S. mainland and local independent growers to establish more cultivation sites in Hawaii. These individuals perceive that Hawaii has marijuana-friendly laws, resulting in a low risk of prosecution for illicit cannabis cultivation.

The availability and abuse of other illicit drugs and controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) vary throughout the Hawaii HIDTA region. Mexican polydrug organizations and criminal groups supply multipound quantities of black tar heroin and powder cocaine to the area. Powder and crack cocaine are available on Oahu, primarily in the Chinatown area. Crack cocaine is converted on a limited basis at or near distribution sites on an as-needed basis, typically in ounce quantities, by local street-level distributors. Powder cocaine is more frequently sold and abused on other islands, including the Big Island and Maui. MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy) is distributed primarily in nightclubs within the Waikiki district of Honolulu by Asian criminal groups and street gangs. The drug is also distributed at electronic music festivals and raves. Over the last year, HIDTA officials reported several incidents involving the abuse of other drugs, including the hallucinogen *Salvia divinorum*, synthetic cannabinoids commonly referred to as "K2" and "Spice," and mephedrone, also known as 4-MMC. (See text box on page 4.) CPDs are most easily and frequently obtained locally from unscrupulous

d. 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.

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

f. D,I-methamphetamine (dextro-levo-methamphetamine) is clandestinely produced using the P2P method, the preferred methamphetamine production method in the late 1970s and early 1980s. D,I-methamphetamine is less potent than d-methamphetamine.

physicians and pharmacies that prescribe and dispense large quantities of these drugs to customers who have no legitimate need. CPD abuse typically involves prescription opioids, primarily oxycodones, and crosses all demographic categories.

Other Drugs

Salvia divinorum is a perennial herb in the mint family native to certain areas of the Sierra Mazateca region of Oaxaca, Mexico. Salvinorin A, also called Divinorin A, is the ingredient responsible for the hallucinogenic effects of Salvia divinorum. Street names include Maria Pastora, Sage of the Seers, Diviner's Sage, Salvia, Sally-D, and Magic Mint. Currently, neither Salvia divinorum nor any of its constituents, including salvinorin A, are controlled under the federal Controlled Substances Act.

"K2" and "Spice" are the brand names of synthetic cannabinoid products sold as "herbal incense" in independently owned retail stores (herbal stores and smoke shops) and on Internet web sites and online auction sites. Packaging usually indicates that they are "not for human consumption," to evade federal law enforcement scrutiny. A common street term for synthetic cannabinoid products is "legal marijuana." Users have indicated on Internet forum posts that highs last between 30 minutes and 2 hours and describe out-of-body experiences. Aside from the typical "high," other effects may include vomiting, seizures, and breathlessness.

Mephedrone, also known as 4-methylmethcathinone (4-MMC) or 4-methylephedrone, reportedly causes effects described as a cross between those of methamphetamine and MDMA, producing euphoria, stimulation, and empathy. Some users report that crashes are more severe than with MDMA. Mephedrone is most commonly sold as a white powder or as capsules containing the powder but is also available in tablet form. It is imported mainly from China and is sold as a plant fertilizer over the Internet. It is sometimes sold mixed with methylone, often known as "Bubbles" or "Miaow Miaow."

Sources: Drug Enforcement Administration; Honolulu Police Department; South Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Intelligence Center.

Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican DTOs are the principal transporters of ice methamphetamine, marijuana, powder cocaine, and black tar heroin from sources in Mexico and the West Coast of the United States into the region. Mexican DTOs typically focus their efforts on wholesale-level sales, supplying smaller Mexican and Asia-Pacific mixed-race DTOs that distribute drugs at the midlevel and retail level throughout the state.

Asian DTOs (typically ethnic Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Thai, or Vietnamese) operate throughout the HIDTA region. The drug trafficking threat that they pose is secondary to the threat posed by Mexican DTOs that have well-established distribution networks. Asian DTOs transport wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine from California and Asia; MDMA, including MDMA combined with BZP (N-benzylpiperazine) and TFMPP (1-(3-trifluoromethylphenyl)piperazine),^g from Canada and Asia; and high-potency marijuana from Canada and the West Coast. Asian traffickers also use Hawaii as a transshipment point for ice methamphetamine transported from the West Coast to the Pacific Basin, primarily Guam.

Members of Pacific Islander groups (typically individuals of native Hawaiian, Samoan, or Tongan ethnicity) transport and distribute wholesale to retail quantities of ice methamphetamine and powder cocaine (which they also convert to crack) that they obtain from sources in Mexico and the mainland. Local and Pacific Islander DTOs generally control the distribution of marijuana produced in Hawaii to markets within and outside the state.

Local distributors, including street gangs, prison gangs, and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs), are the primary retail distributors of illicit drugs in the Hawaii HIDTA region. Some members of these groups also produce marijuana in Hawaii. These groups are typically composed of native Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Hispanic, and Caucasian individuals who were born and raised in Hawaii and share either familial or close social ties. The diversity of these groups facilitates close working relationships with international DTOs (Mexican, Asian, and Pacific Islander) that supply them with drugs, presenting challenges for law enforcement investigations.

BZP is a common name for the synthetic stimulant N-benzylpiperazine. BZP tablets, especially those that also contain the hallucinogen g. TFMPP, are often sold as MDMA or promoted as an alternative to MDMA.

Production

Outdoor cannabis cultivation is widespread throughout the state and continues to occur at high levels. The number of outdoor plants eradicated in the state fell from 131,355 in 2007 to 102,398 in 2008 and 47,159 in 2009. These decreases are largely attributed to constraints placed upon law enforcement eradication efforts, particularly on the Big Island. (See text box.) The Hawaiian Islands are one of the principal cannabis cultivation and marijuana production areas in the nation. Cannabis has been cultivated outdoors in Hawaii for decades because the tropical climate is conducive to year-round cultivation. Cannabis grown outdoors in Hawaii contains some of the highest THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) levels in the nation because of the optimal growing conditions, nutrient- and mineral-rich volcanic soil, and advances in hybridization techniques. Law enforcement reporting indicates that most outdoor cannabis cultivation takes place on the islands of Hawaii, Maui, Kauai, and Oahu, particularly in areas controlled by the state's Department of Land and Natural Resources in Hawaii and Maui Counties.

Cannabis Eradication on the Big Island

In May 2008, the Hawaii County Council on the Big Island voted not to accept federal funding from the Drug Enforcement Administration's Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) for state and local law enforcement aerial surveillance and eradication. The council cited complaints from many residents who reportedly opposed the program because low-flying helicopter missions would violate their privacy and disrupt rural life. The Council also established a county ordinance (Hawaii County Code, Section 14, Article 16) making cannabis the lowest drug priority for law enforcement officers. Consequently, state and local law enforcement agencies have been severely constrained in their efforts to effectively monitor and remove illicit grows.

Indoor cannabis cultivation persists in Hawaii because growers can control conditions to produce high-potency marijuana, which commands premium prices in most drug markets. Indoor cannabis cultivators typically use advanced growing techniques that include lighting, irrigation systems, chemical fertilizers, and plant cloning. Indoor grow sites typically average fewer plants than outdoor grows and range in size from a single closet to entire houses or larger buildings that are converted into advanced grow operations. Annual seizures of indoor cannabis plants in Hawaii have varied greatly over the past 5 years, ranging from a low of 373 in 2008 to a high of 12,358 in 2006. Caucasian and Asian criminal groups and local independent dealers are the primary producers of high-potency marijuana from indoor cannabis cultivation sites.

Law enforcement officials have reported an influx of criminal groups and independent growers from the West Coast who are relocating to Hawaii to establish illicit cannabis cultivation operations at both outdoor and indoor grows. These growers are motivated by the greater profits associated with high-potency marijuana and the misguided perception that there is minimal risk of detection and prosecution for illegally cultivating cannabis in the state because of reduced eradication efforts and the widespread abuse of state medical marijuana laws. Law enforcement officials report that they often find medical marijuana certificates while serving search and arrest warrants but seize far greater amounts of marijuana than allowed by law, in addition to other illicit drugs and weapons.

Transportation

Drug traffickers exploit Hawaii's heavy reliance on the importation of consumer goods by air and maritime conveyances to transport illicit drugs to the state. Most illicit drugs are transported into the Honolulu International Airport on Oahu through the international postal facility or by couriers aboard commercial flights. While most of the illicit drugs transported to Oahu are abused there, some drugs are transported on interisland flights to neighboring islands for subsequent distribution. Additionally, six of the eight islands have direct flight service to and from major cities on the U.S. mainland, Asia, and Canada.

The maritime conveyance of illicit drugs in transit to and from the U.S. mainland is perhaps the most significant intelligence gap with regard to the drug situation in Hawaii and a great concern among federal, state, and local law enforcement. Hawaii's system of commercial harbors consists of 10 harbors on six islands through which the majority of the commercial goods are imported to Hawaii. Limited information and resources make detection and interdiction efforts at these facilities extremely challenging for U.S. Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement

officials. Anecdotal law enforcement information indicates that illicit drugs are being shipped in containerized cargo bound for Hawaii; however, relatively few seizures have been made.

Hawaii is also a transshipment point for ice methamphetamine en route to locations in Oceania, Guam, Saipan, and other U.S. territories in the Pacific. Direct connections to Pacific Rim countries and Southeast Asia are also used, although to a lesser extent. Additionally, Hawaii and the West Coast of the United States are at risk for the importation of ice methamphetamine produced in Oceania and Pacific Rim countries. Hawaii HIDTA law enforcement and intelligence reporting indicates that organized criminal groups are financing large-scale clandestine ice methamphetamine production laboratories in Oceania and Pacific Rim countries and that an increasing amount of that ice methamphetamine is transported to Hawaii.

Distribution

Mexican traffickers dominate wholesale drug distribution in the Hawaii HIDTA region, primarily supplying other Mexican, Pacific Islander, and local criminal groups. These groups in turn supply midlevel quantities to retail distributors, primarily street gangs and independent dealers. Retail drug sales in metropolitan areas take place in open-air markets (located on streets and in parking lots) and in clubs and bars, particularly in the Chinatown area of Oahu. Retail drug sales in rural areas usually take place at prearranged locations and typically are between dealers and known or referred customers.

Drug-Related Crime

Law enforcement reporting indicates that ice methamphetamine is the drug that most contributes to violent and property crime in the Hawaii HIDTA region. According to the Western States Information Network (WSIN), there were 2,730 drug-related critical events^h in 2009, 42 percent (1,148) of which were methamphetamine-related. Each of the five Hawaii state and local law enforcement agencies responding to the NDTS 2009 indicate that methamphetamine is the drug that most contributes to violent and property crime in their jurisdictions. Additionally, data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives show that 21 of the 44 cases investigated in Hawaii in 2008 were drug-related; of those, 15 were methamphetamine-related.

Home invasion robberies of illegal indoor cannabis grow sites are another concern for law enforcement agencies in the HIDTA region. HIDTA officials report that many of these robberies are repeat burglaries and rip-offs by rival traffickers that often go unreported because the victims do not want to alert law enforcement to their own illicit activities. Additionally, most illicit growers use rental properties for their cultivation operations. Once a property is vacated by the growers, the new tenants are still at risk of home invasion robberies because the property has been a known grow site.

Although not common, acts of violence between rival street-level drug gangs do occur. For example, in April 2009, two individuals affiliated with a gang from San Francisco, California, shot and killed a local rival gang member in the Chinatown area of Oahu. Both gangs were involved in crack cocaine distribution in addition to other criminal activities, including murder, kidnapping, prostitution, robbery, and gambling.

Abuse

Methamphetamine and marijuana abuse are the most critical drug concerns in Hawaii. High levels of methamphetamine abuse severely strain the resources of public health departments, treatment centers, and social services agencies in the state. Data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) reveal that methamphetamines/amphetamines were identified more often than any other drug, including alcohol, as the primary substance of abuse for treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Hawaii from 2004 through 2008 (the latest year for which data are available). (See Table 1 on page 7.) Methamphetamine-related domestic violence, child abuse, and child neglect place a burden on local foster care systems and social services. For example, in February 2010, a Honolulu man was sentenced to life in a state prison for the murder of a 23-monthold toddler he was supposedly baby-sitting. While high on methamphetamine in January 2008, the man threw the toddler off a pedestrian overpass to his death on the H-1 Freeway. During the trial, the toddler's mother testified that

h. WSIN defines a critical event as a law enforcement activity that requires law enforcement agents or officers to respond to a predetermined location to conduct a proactive investigation.

she was gambling in Chinatown, smoking methamphetamine, and shoplifting at the Ala Moana Center on the day her child was killed. The number of treatment admissions for marijuana/hashish abuse is also very high—second only to the number of admissions for methamphetamine/amphetamine abuse. It is especially important to note that 77 percent of the marijuana/hashish admissions were for adolescents and young adults. Cocaine, heroin, CPDs, and other drugs are also abused throughout Hawaii, but to a lesser extent.

Drug Type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
Methamphetamine/amphetamines	2,381	2,624	2,181	2,184	1,807	
Marijuana/hashish	1,215	1,577	1,618	1,783	1,671	
Cocaine	279	222	302	245	234	
Heroin	156	162	160	148	141	
Other opiates	112	155	134	173	179	

Table 1. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities in Hawaii. 2004–2008

Source: Treatment Episode Data Set.

Illicit Finance

Mexican and Asian DTOs are law enforcement's leading concern with respect to drug money laundering in the HIDTA region. These groups primarily employ couriers aboard commercial flights and wire transfers to move money from Hawaii to drug source areas. Mexican DTOs send drug proceeds primarily by package delivery services, U.S. mail, air couriers, or maritime freight from locations throughout Hawaii either directly to Mexico or through major consolidation sites on the U.S. mainland—Arizona, California, Nevada, and Texas—en route to Mexico. Asian DTOs often send bulk drug proceeds generated in Hawaii to their home countries, where the money is typically used to purchase business or real property. Law enforcement reporting indicates that a number of Asian DTOs also launder drug proceeds through the purchase of expensive residential real estate in Hawaii.

Traffickers, particularly Asian criminal groups, also launder money through informal value transfer systems (IVTSs)ⁱ such as *hawala*, *hundi*, and *fei ch'ien*. Many of these IVTSs are culturally biased and, because of their clandestine nature, are difficult to monitor. Illicit money transfers made through these underground systems are easily concealed in the high volume of legal transfers made within the systems.

Outlook

Hawaii has strategic drug trafficking and marketing significance for Mexican DTOs because it provides these organizations with a gateway to other markets in the Pacific. NDIC analysts expect Mexican DTOs' dominance over wholesale ice methamphetamine, cocaine, and black tar heroin distribution in the region to remain unchallenged. The trafficking and abuse of ice methamphetamine will remain the most significant drug threat to the HIDTA region. Asian DTOs and criminal groups will expand their influence and operations in the region, particularly the smuggling and distribution of high-potency marijuana and MDMA. The Hawaii HIDTA region will remain one of the most significant cannabis cultivation and marijuana production areas in the nation. The demand for high-potency marijuana in the region is increasing, and there are no indications that this will change in the near term. Increased cultivation will be supported by a greater number of criminal groups and independent growers from the West Coast relocating to Hawaii to establish illicit cannabis cultivation operations at both outdoor and indoor grows, particularly on the Big Island. Public lands in remote areas of the region will increasingly be used by local criminal groups and independent dealers for outdoor cultivation. Illegal cannabis cultivators will increasingly exploit state medical marijuana laws to conduct and expand their illicit cultivation and distribution operations.

i. An informal value transfer system is any network or mechanism that can be used to transfer funds or value from place to place without leaving a formal paper trail of the entire transaction or going through regulated financial institutions.

Sources

Local, State, and Regional

Hawaii County Police Department Hawaii Police Department Honolulu Police Department Kauai Hawaii Interagency Mobile Police Apprehension Task Force Kona Vice Section Kauai Police Department Maui Hawaii Interagency Mobile Police Apprehension Task Force Maui Police Department Oahu Hawaii Interagency Mobile Police Apprehension Task Force State of Hawaii, www.hawaii.gov Attorney General's Office Center for Substance Abuse Treatment Department of Public Safety Narcotics Enforcement Division Department of Transportation Honolulu Prosecutor's Office

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Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area

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