May 2001

California

Central District

Drug Threat Assessment



National Drug Intelligence Center
U.S. Department of Justice

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Preface

This report is a strategic assessment that addresses the status and outlook of the drug threat in the Central U.S. Attorney District of California. Analytical judgment determined the threat posed by each drug type or category, taking into account the most current quantitative and qualitative information on availability, demand, production or cultivation, transportation, and distribution, as well as the effects of a particular drug on abusers and society as a whole. While NDIC sought to incorporate the latest available information, a time lag often exists between collection and publication of data, particularly demand-related data sets. NDIC anticipates that this drug threat assessment will be useful to policymakers, law enforcement personnel, and treatment providers at the federal, state, and local levels because it draws upon a broad range of information sources to describe and analyze the drug threat in the Central U.S. Attorney District of California.

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California
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Executive Summary

Mexican drug trafficking organizations present the greatest threat to the communities of the Central District of California. The district's extensive transportation infrastructure and its proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border make it an ideal location for the storage, distribution, and transshipment of illegal drugs smuggled into the country from Mexico. Los Angeles is not only a major West Coast transportation hub for illegal drugs destined for cities throughout the United States, but also a major storage and distribution center for drugs smuggled into the country by Mexican drug trafficking organizations. These organizations are responsible for most of the drugs smuggled into and sold within the district, although numerous Hispanic and African American street gangs also are involved in the retail distribution of drugs. Cocaine and methamphetamine are the primary and secondary drug threats to the district, respectively, followed by heroin, marijuana, and other dangerous drugs such as MDMA and LSD.

Cocaine is the most significant drug threat to the Central District. The district is a transshipment point for cocaine that is destined for many U.S. cities and, to a lesser extent, Canada. The primary smugglers and distributors of cocaine are Mexican drug trafficking organizations and other Mexican criminal groups. Mexican drug trafficking organizations and Mexican criminal groups obtain cocaine from Colombian drug trafficking organizations and then smuggle the drug into the district for wholesale distribution. Though cocaine has stabilized in purity and price, it still remains the district's number one drug threat. Treatment admissions and cocaine-related law enforcement actions both increased in 1999. Crack cocaine continues to be distributed at the retail level by African American and Hispanic street gangs.

Methamphetamine ranks second to cocaine as a significant drug threat. From 1997 to 1999, the price and amounts of methamphetamine seized in the Central District of California increased. Although the purity levels of methamphetamine decreased significantly over the same period, recent reports indicate purity levels are slowly rising. The district is classified as a major source of domestically produced methamphetamine. Numerous methamphetamine laboratories are located in the Central District of California, including a number of superlabs operated by Mexican drug trafficking organizations, which use the district as both a distribution center and a transshipment hub. In

response to increased law enforcement pressure, some larger methamphetamine laboratory operations are being relocated to areas outside the district. Mexican drug trafficking organizations control the wholesale and retail distribution of methamphetamine in the district. They supply powdered methamphetamine to Asian criminal groups who then convert it into crystal methamphetamine (ice). These Asian groups dominate the sale of ice in the district.

Mexican black tar is the most prevalent type of heroin available in the Central District. Los Angeles is a major distribution center and transshipment point for Mexican black tar and brown powdered heroin destined for locations within California as well as cities primarily in the western United States. Mexican black tar heroin, smuggled and sold by Mexican drug trafficking organizations, is increasing in availability and purity throughout the district. South American heroin, produced and supplied by Colombian drug trafficking organizations, is also available in the area. Though Southeast Asian and Southwest Asian heroin is transshipped through Los Angeles to the eastern United States, it is not encountered as frequently by law enforcement in the district.

Domestic cannabis cultivation and foreign-produced marijuana are significant threats to the Central District of California. Mexican marijuana is generally the least expensive type found in the district because of its wide availability and lower THC content, which is reported at approximately 4 to 6 percent. In contrast, domestically produced marijuana—particularly that cultivated from hydroponic indoor grows—is a higher grade (24 to 26%) and more expensive. High quality marijuana from Canada ("BC Bud") is also available in the area. Mexican drug trafficking organizations and criminal groups dominate the wholesale marijuana market in the Los Angeles area, while Hispanic and African American street gangs are the predominant distributors of marijuana at the retail level.

The abuse of other dangerous drugs—especially those associated with rave parties such as MDMA, GHB, LSD, and Rohypnol—is increasing in the Central District. Of particular concern is that younger party crowds, including teenagers, are abusing these drugs. The danger becomes greater as these drugs are ingested with alcohol, other drugs, or both. Israeli organized crime syndicates control most of the European market and are the primary MDMA source for distribution groups in the United States. There is evidence that Russian organized crime is also involved in the smuggling and wholesale distribution of MDMA.

Violence associated with the drug trade is a major concern for authorities in the Central District. As the availability of drugs, particularly cocaine and methamphetamine, continues to rise the violence associated with the activities of Mexican drug trafficking organizations may increase. Colombian and Russian criminal groups appear to be increasing their presence in the area as well, escalating the potential for violence as these groups vie with established drug trafficking organizations for a share in the trade. The battle for control of retail distribution by Hispanic and African American street gangs is increasing the possibility of violence. These gangs are extremely violent and contribute to conditions that threaten public safety.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary iii

Overview 1

Cocaine 4
- Abuse 4
- Availability 5
- Violence 6
- Production 7
- Transportation 7
- Distribution 8

Methamphetamine 11
- Abuse 12
- Availability 12
- Violence 13
- Production 13
- Transportation 16
- Distribution 16

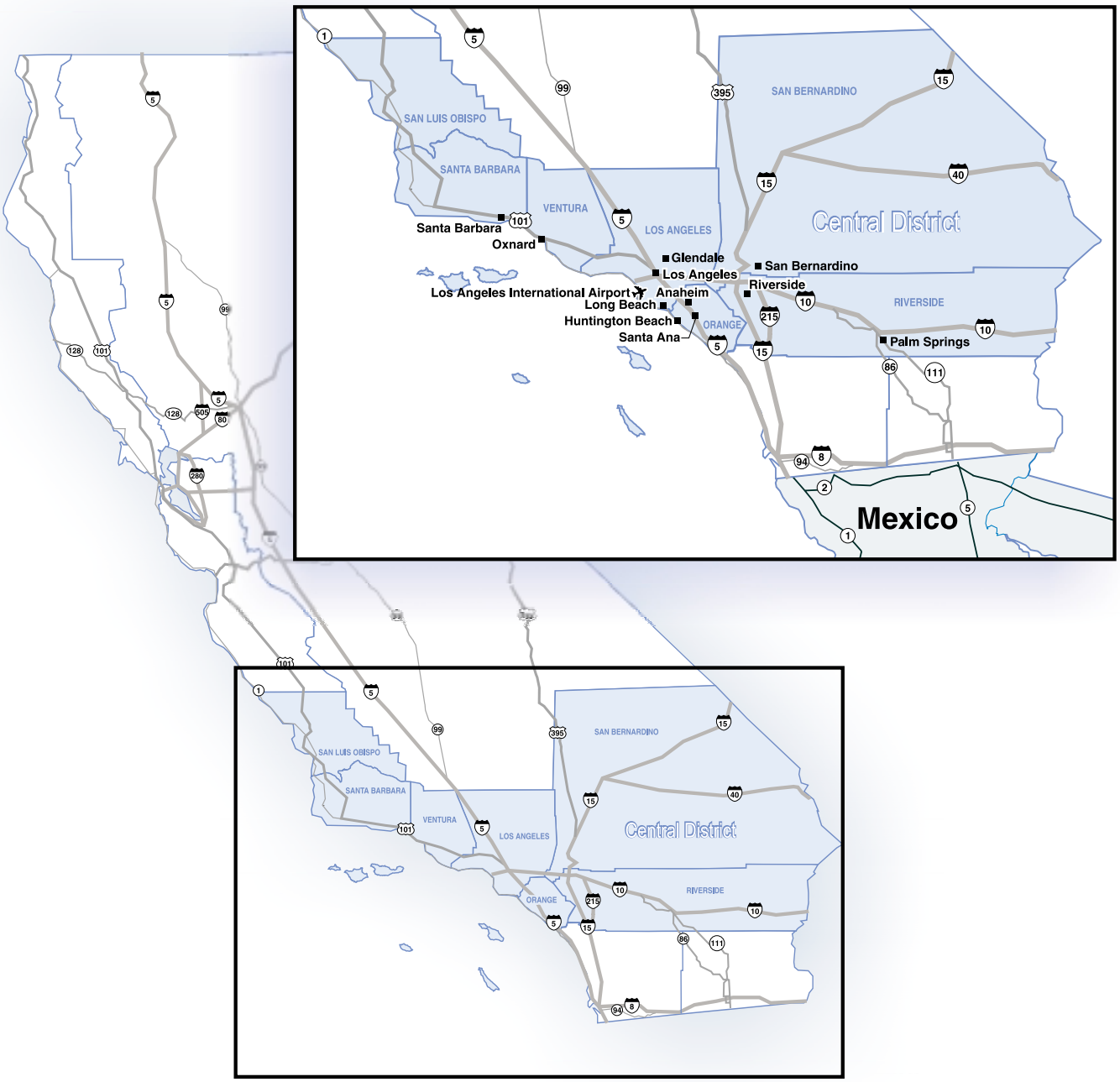
Heroin 17
- Abuse 18
- Availability 18
- Violence 19
- Production 19
- Transportation 20
- Distribution 21

Marijuana 22
- Abuse 23
- Availability 23
- Violence 24
- Production 24
- Transportation 25
- Distribution 26

Other Dangerous Drugs 27
- MDMA 27
- GHB 29
- LSD 29
- PCP 30
- Rohypnol 30
- Ketamine 31

Outlook 32

Sources 33



Central District of California.

Note: This map displays features mentioned in the report.

California
Central District
Drug Threat Assessment

Overview

The Central District includes the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. It is the most populated federal judicial district in the United States, exceeding 15.5 million. Los Angeles, with 3.8 million people—an estimated 8,146 persons per square mile—is the largest city in the state, and the second largest in the United States. Four other cities within the district have year 2000 population estimates in excess of 200,000 people: Long Beach (457,600), Santa Ana (317,700), Anaheim (310,700), and Riverside (259,700). The district also boasts one of the best transportation infrastructures in the country. It has an extensive coastline, intricate highway and railway systems, and a number of regional and international airports.

The Central District's coastline extends over 350 miles from the San Diego County line in the south to the Monterey County line in the north and is home to two of the busiest maritime ports in the world, Long Beach and Los Angeles. The Port of Long Beach is the nation's busiest maritime cargo container facility, while the Port of Los Angeles ranks second; more than 7.9 million 20-foot cargo container units moved into the two ports in fiscal year (FY) 1999.

Fast Facts

Central California
(Central U.S. Attorney District)
(statewide data marked *)

Population (1999)	15.5 million
Median household income (2000 estimate)	$56,333
***Unemployment rate (2000)**	5.0%
Land area	32,918 square miles
Shoreline	350 miles
***Capital**	Sacramento
Other principal cities	Anaheim, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Riverside, Santa Ana
Number of counties	7
Principal industries	Entertainment, financial services, manufacturing, biotechnology

Los Angeles is also home to the world's third busiest airport—Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). Over 64 million people and over 2 million tons of goods were moved through LAX in 1999. The airport handles over 1,000 cargo flights each day; 50 percent of this activity is international in origin or destination.

Residents of the Central District primarily depend on automobiles for transportation and the Los Angeles area has one of the most intricate highway systems in the world. Of these, Interstates 5, 10, 15, and 40 connect the district to the rest of the nation. Interstate 5 runs from the U.S.–Canada border to the U.S.–Mexico border and links Los Angeles to other key West Coast cities such as San Diego, Oakland, San Francisco, Sacramento, Portland, and Seattle. Interstate 10 originates in Santa Monica, California, and runs across the United States to I–95 in Jacksonville, Florida. Interstate 15 originates in the district and runs northeast through Las Vegas, Nevada, to the U.S.–Canada border in Montana. Interstate 40 originates at I–15 in the district and runs east, terminating in Wilmington, North Carolina. In addition, state highways 1 and 101 are extensively traveled coastal roadways.

The district is serviced by transcontinental and regional passenger rail lines and two major freight railways. Many of the regional routes connect the district to San Diego, near the U.S.–Mexico border, while the transcontinental route extends east to the heartland of the country.

The Los Angeles High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) encompasses Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties. The Los Angeles HIDTA considers the overland transportation of illicit drugs the number one threat. The Los Angeles area is a major storage and transshipment point for illicit drugs smuggled to other states, as well as to Canada and some Pacific Rim countries. Los Angeles is a major transshipment point for the exportation of drug proceeds to other countries.

All major drugs of abuse are readily available in the Central District. According to law enforcement officials, powdered and crack cocaine and methamphetamine present the most significant threats. The district is a major methamphetamine production source not only for the state but also for much of the country. Mexican black tar heroin is the predominant heroin marketed within the district. Marijuana is the most available drug in the district; both marijuana transshipment and domestic cannabis cultivation are significant threats to the district. Mexican marijuana is widely available and least expensive. The abuse of other dangerous drugs, such as MDMA, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), and Rohypnol, usually associated with rave parties, is significantly affecting the district. Of particular concern is that younger party crowds, including teenagers, are abusing these drugs.

Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and criminal groups control most of the drug distribution in the Los Angeles HIDTA. Mexican DTOs use underground networks to move or distribute illegal drugs, weapons, and aliens. These networks, typically based on family ties, impede law enforcement as undercover officers and confidential informants cannot infiltrate and gain access to the network.

The Los Angeles HIDTA identified 156 criminal DTOs operating regionally, nationally, and internationally. Of these, 76 percent (118) operate at the national (47) or international (71) level. The degree of involvement ranges from organizations engaging in all facets of the drug trade to organizations involved in a single activity, such as transportation. Sixty-three percent—primarily Mexican DTOs—traffic in cocaine. Many also are involved in the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine (44%) and the distribution of marijuana (15%) and heroin (13%). According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Arellano-Felix organization and, to a lesser extent, the Carrillo-Fuentes and Caro-Quintero organizations control trafficking and distribution activities within the Los Angeles Field Office's jurisdiction.

Drug-related arrest data are helpful in determining the overall drug problem. According to data from the California Department of Alcohol

and Drug Programs for Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties, adult drug-related felonies and misdemeanors fluctuated between 1993 and 1997, reaching a high of almost 128,000 in 1997. In each of the years from 1993 to 1997, the number of adult drug-related felonies accounted for over half of all drug-related arrests. Juvenile drug-related arrests represented about 8 percent of all drug-related arrests in 1993 and remained relatively stable. (See Table 1.)

While drug-related arrests have slightly increased, crime rate statistics indicate that the overall crime rate in the Central District gradually declined between 1993 and 1998, as did the violent crime rate. Property crime rates decreased 41 percent from 14,255 per 100,000 persons in 1993 to 8,377 per 100,000 persons in 1998. Willful homicide rates decreased 42 percent from 67 per 100,000 persons in 1993 to 38 per 100,000 persons in 1998.

Although there was a 42 percent decline in the homicide rate for the entire district between 1993 and 1998, according to a news report, the number of homicides in Los Angeles increased from 192 homicides in 1999 to 250 in the first half of 2000. The report further states that a possible resurgence in gang activity may be a major cause of the recent increase in violence and homicides in Los Angeles, more than 40 percent of which were gang-related.

Increased law enforcement pressure in urban areas is causing gangs to establish new territories and markets in smaller communities and rural areas. As a result, gang violence is spreading from urban to rural areas. Within the Central District, Los Angeles County has an estimated 1,350 gangs with 152,000 members. Most notable are the Mexican Mafia, Bloods, Crips, and the 18th Street Gang. Many of these Los Angeles-based gangs have chapters in cities throughout the United States. These gangs are extremely violent and create harmful environments that threaten public safety.

Table 1. Adult and Juvenile Drug-Related Arrests, Central District of California, 1993-1997

Arrest Category	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Adult Felony	**65,723**	**73,740**	**71,140**	**66,962**	**72,999**
Adult Misdemeanor	**44,328**	**50,984**	**52,362**	**51,009**	**54,988**
Total Adult Drug-Related Arrests	**110,051**	**124,724**	**123,502**	**117,971**	**127,987**
Juvenile	**8,391**	**10,711**	**11,259**	**11,423**	**11,331**
Total Drug-Related Arrests	**118,442**	**135,435**	**134,761**	**129,394**	**139,318**

Source: California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, 1997.

Cocaine

The transshipment, distribution, availability, and abuse of powdered and crack cocaine are the primary drug threats to the Central District. Cocaine is widely available in the district; its purity and price remain stable. The primary smugglers and distributors of cocaine are Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and other Mexican criminal groups. Colombian DTOs are also involved in the smuggling, transportation, and distribution of cocaine, though to a lesser extent. Cocaine is smuggled overland across the Southwest Border and moved into the district inside trucks and passenger vehicles. Los Angeles remains a transportation hub for cocaine that is transshipped to many U.S. cities and Canada. Crack cocaine is the drug most often associated with violence in the Los Angeles area where African American and Hispanic street gangs distribute it at the retail level.

Abuse

According to the California Alcohol and Drug Data System (CADDS) produced by the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, cocaine treatment admissions decreased 12 percent between FY1994 and FY1997, from 9,533 to 8,384 respectively. Following this decline, admissions increased 23 percent, from 9,112 in FY1998 to 11,246 in FY2000. These figures, however, may not be fully comparable because in FY1998, according to CADDS, modifications were made to drug terminology when compiling admissions data. (See Table 2.)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) reports the estimated number of emergency department (ED) cocaine mentions for Los Angeles–Long Beach increased between 1991 and 1999, from 4,901 to 6,772. However, cocaine-related deaths reported to DAWN decreased in Los Angeles between 1995 and 1998, from 545 to 425. Although the number of cocaine-related deaths may have declined, cocaine is still the second leading cause of drug-related deaths in Los Angeles.

Table 2. Primary Drug Treatment Admissions, Central District of California, 1994-2000

Drug Category	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Heroin	**43,895**	**40,634**	**38,023**	**35,454**	**35,133**	**35,484**	**36,717**
Cocaine	**9,533**	**8,816**	**8,936**	**8,384**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**
Cocaine/Crack*	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**9,112**	**10,850**	**11,246**
Amphetamine	**9,349**	**10,100**	**8,627**	**10,764**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**
Methamphetamine*	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**11,277**	**10,247**	**11,664**
Other Amphetamines*	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**369**	**385**	**336**
Other Drugs	**6,189**	**5,936**	**6,527**	**6,451**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**
Marijuana/Hashish*	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**	**5,284**	**5,961**	**6,494**

*Note: CADDS made modifications to drug terminology beginning in fiscal year 1998. An "NA" indicates that data was recorded under a different drug category for that fiscal year.

Source: California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, California Alcohol and Drug Data System, 2000.

The National Institute of Justice Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) Program identifies cocaine as the drug of choice for both male and female adult arrestees in Los Angeles. Between 1990 and 1998, the percentage of adult male arrestees testing positive for cocaine ranged from a high of 51.6 percent (1992) to a low of 37.6 percent (1997). Between 1990 and 1998, the percentage of adult females testing positive for cocaine ranged from a high of 62 percent (1991) to a low of 45 percent (1998). According to the 1999 ADAM Annual Report, 36 percent of adult male arrestees and 37 percent of adult females tested positive for cocaine in Los Angeles. Nationally, the percentages ranked Los Angeles close to the country's median rates of 34 and 38 percent respectively.

Availability

Cocaine remains widely available in the Central District. In FY1999, authorities in the Los Angeles HIDTA conducted 5,793 cocaine-related law enforcement actions, representing 38 percent of 15,245 drug-related events by law enforcement. Cocaine-related law enforcement actions increased 18 percent, from 4,890 in FY1998 to 5,793 in FY1999.

According to the Los Angeles HIDTA, cocaine purity and price have remained stable. In FY1999, the cocaine purity rate was 80 percent at the wholesale level and the price for multikilogram purchases ranged from $13,700 to $17,000 per kilogram. While the amount of cocaine seized by the Los Angeles HIDTA increased from 50,292.95 pounds in FY1997 to 71,744.49 pounds in FY1998, it decreased to 31,731.28 pounds in FY1999. The Los Angeles Police Department also has seen a decline in the amount of cocaine seized; the amount seized in 1999 is substantially lower than the amounts seized in years prior to 1998.

In contrast, between FY1998 and FY1999, U.S. Customs Service (USCS) seizures increased 93 percent, from 2,432 pounds to 4,690 pounds. However, through September 2000, USCS cocaine seizures declined dramatically from 4,690 pounds in FY1999 to 288 pounds in FY2000. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. U. S. Customs Service, Drug Seizures by Port (in Pounds), FY1998-FY2000

	Cocaine			Methamphetamine			Heroin			Marijuana		
Port Facility	FY98	FY99	FY00	FY98	FY99	FY00	FY98	FY99	FY00	FY98	FY99	FY00
Los Angeles	1,702.6	4,123.2	183.0	83.1	168.4	52.3	12.4	36.3	3.5	4,878.1	14,203.6	11,005.4
San Luis	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.0	0.0	2,486.1
Long Beach	5.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	0.0
Hueneme	614.4	0.6	5.5	11.0	2.6	26.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	557.0	0.0	893.5
Palm Springs	NA	NA	NA	0.0	0.0	1.0	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
LAX INTL Airport	110.2	336.9	41.4	0.0	3.9	2.4	94.8	14.6	82.0	3,490.1	1,787.5	217.5
Ontario INTL Airport	0.0	229.3	58.0	0.0	6.1	85.7	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	2,517.7	1,320.9
Total	2,432.4	4,690.0	287.9	94.1	181.0	167.6	107.2	50.9	88.0	8,929.7	18,508.8	15,923.4

Source: USCS, Office of Information and Technology, *Customs Officers Clear Arrest and Seizures Summary, FY2000.*

Violence

The U.S. Attorney for the Central District considers crack cocaine a serious and continuing threat because of its addictive properties and relationship to other criminal activity. Distribution predominantly occurs through street corner and crack house sales, creating violent and harmful environments throughout the affected neighborhoods. Various reports indicate that gang violence is decreasing in urban areas where increased law enforcement activity is evident, while increasing in smaller communities and rural areas as gangs establish new territories and markets.

The Mongols, an extremely violent outlaw motorcycle gang (OMG) that distributes cocaine, operates in the Los Angeles area. In a recent Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) undercover investigation, members of the Mongols were charged with murder and drug and firearm violations. As a result of the investigation, Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies and federal agents seized kilogram quantities of cocaine, stolen motorcycles, and dozens of illegal guns—including a Mac-10 assault weapon and a sawed-off shotgun. Members of this gang were also suspected of extortion and arson.

The Mexican Mafia (La Eme), a prison-based gang operating in the Los Angeles area, uses violence to control the drug trade. This group operates both inside and outside the prison system and, within each prison, the group usually has separate La Eme leadership. The Mexican Mafia organizational structure is similar to that of Italian organized crime; it is composed of generals, captains, lieutenants, and soldiers. La Eme is well organized; its members are disciplined and kill as a means of intimidation and to obtain respect.

A faction of the 18th Street Gang, known as the Columbia Li'l Cycos, also has a propensity for violence. This gang deals crack cocaine and operates primarily in the MacArthur Park area near downtown Los Angeles. The gang employs violence and intimidation to control its area of operations. Members of the Cycos were indicted and accused of three executions, several attempted murders, and numerous beatings.

The Sinaloan Cowboys, a violent Mexican group, supplies some Los Angeles street gangs with cocaine. It employs members of gangs to commit assassinations and provide security for drug transportation. Also known as the "Cartel Cowboys," group members are ruthless and have

Los Angeles Gangs

Crips and Bloods: There are approximately 65,000 African American gang members in California, the majority Crips and Bloods. The gang members are violent and use high-powered automatic weapons. Criminal activities include drug trafficking, robbery, burglary, grand theft, assault, drive-by shooting, murder, and witness tampering. These gangs have migrated throughout the country and are seen in most states and prison populations.

Hispanic Street Gangs: Hispanic street gangs dominate the gang population in California. Law enforcement in California identified 1,818 active Hispanic street gangs. Incarcerated members of Southern California Hispanic gangs tend to align themselves with the prison-based gang, La Eme, which exerts substantial influence over the activities of many Hispanic street gangs. These alignments often result in acts of violence. From 1992 to 1998, the California Department of Justice recorded 2,993 Hispanic gang-related homicides—61 percent of all gang-related homicides. Historically, Hispanic gangs were exclusively male but the number of female Hispanic gangs is increasing. In addition to drug distribution, criminal activities committed by Hispanic gangs include robbery, burglary, grand theft, auto theft, assault, drive-by shooting, murder, home invasion robbery, weapons trafficking, and witness tampering.

Source: National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations.

little fear of authority. Members are very loyal and would rather engage in a shootout than be apprehended. The Sinaloan Cowboys are responsible for a rash of killings south of the border. The killings are believed to be reprisals against individuals who turned against the group in the early 1990s. Group members dress in cowboy-style hats, long sleeve silk shirts, and white or beige pants with a leather patch on the right rear hip with the name of their hometown. They wear metal belt buckles inscribed with a marijuana leaf, an AK-47, or the initials WBP (Wet Back Power), expensive boots, and gold chains with a gold AK-47, or a gold cross with an anchor design.

Production

Coca is not cultivated nor is cocaine produced in the Central District. Colombian criminal organizations produce cocaine in Colombia and ship it to the United States through Central America and Mexico. One of nine drug routes specified in a USCS FY1999 Threat Assessment, this route is labeled the "Cocaine Corridor" and is one of the most lucrative drug pipelines in the world.

Gangs in Los Angeles convert powdered cocaine into crack and either distribute the crack locally or transport it to other cities in California and nationally. Hispanic and African American gangs are heavily involved in the distribution of crack cocaine in the Los Angeles area.

Transportation

Cocaine is transported into and out of the Central District by land, sea, and air. According to the DEA, most of the cocaine smuggled into the United States is moved through Mexico from Colombia and other source countries. Most cocaine moved into the Los Angeles HIDTA is transported overland across the U.S.–Mexico border. Interstates 5, 10, 15, 40, and 405 are principal roads used to smuggle cocaine, primarily in commercial and personal vehicles. According to the U.S. Attorney for the Central District, most of the cocaine entering the district is smuggled overland across the Southwest Border inside trucks and passenger vehicles. Traffickers perform "shotgun runs"—a technique designed to curtail large losses by using small trucks and personal vehicles to make frequent trips carrying small amounts—through various ports of entry (POEs) and on to the Los Angeles area. Once the cocaine is smuggled into Los Angeles, it is usually stored and eventually transshipped north to other West Coast cities and east to Chicago and New York and points in between such as Phoenix, Denver, and Detroit.

The DEA reports that in addition to transit by commercial vehicles such as tractor-trailers, shipments of cocaine—averaging 20 to 40 kilograms—are often concealed in hidden compartments of personal vehicles and transported across the U.S.–Mexico border. Shipments are then moved to Los Angeles or Riverside where the cocaine is usually placed in stash houses. The USCS Los Angeles Area Intelligence Unit considers Los Angeles a main storage and distribution center for cocaine transshipped to states across the country.

The Los Angeles HIDTA reports that drugs may also be transported by rail. Transcontinental and regional passenger rail lines and two major freight railways service the district. Many of the regional routes connect the district to San Diego, near the U.S.–Mexico border, while the transcontinental routes connect the district with other U.S. regions, Mexico, and Canada.

The Central District's 350-mile-long coastline, busy seaports, coves, and the proximity of

major highways to the coast make maritime transport an ideal method for moving cocaine and other drugs into the area. The Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles rank first and second in the country in cargo transport as over 7.9 million 20-foot cargo container units moved into the two ports during FY1999. Mexican DTOs also use maritime routes to California—particularly the Los Angeles area.

Air transit is also used to move cocaine into and out of the Central District. One polydrug organization, in particular, used single and twin engine aircraft to move cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine into and out of Los Angeles. A number of organizations also hire couriers to fly on commercial airlines to transport cocaine. Couriers are known to "bodypack" the drug to avoid detection.

The DEA reports that large quantities of powdered cocaine controlled by Mexican and Colombian DTOs are transported into the Los Angeles area for local, regional, and national distribution. The availability of intermodal transportation allows drug traffickers to move drugs into and out of the district by several means. Mexican DTOs reportedly have smuggled cocaine shipments exceeding 1,000 kilograms into California. According to the FBI, Mexican DTOs typically transport an average of 300 to 500 kilograms of cocaine and store it for only a short period of time before distribution. The FBI also reports that Mexican DTOs sometimes smuggle multiple cocaine shipments of smaller sizes (40 to 50 kilograms) that are consolidated into larger shipments for distribution to other areas of the country.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are the primary wholesale distributors of cocaine in the Central District. In addition, Colombian cartels play a role in distributing cocaine. Both groups supply Hispanic gangs who distribute at the retail level. Midlevel Mexican criminal groups supply African American street gangs—such as the Bloods and Crips—with cocaine. Some OMGs, such as the Mongols, also distribute cocaine.

Los Angeles—Fourteen People Arrested in Cocaine Trafficking Ring

FBI agents arrested 14 people allegedly involved in a cocaine trafficking ring that sold drugs in poor neighborhoods of smaller cities. The arrests came after a 2-year investigation. Colombian drug cartels formerly sold cocaine directly to Los Angeles street gangs, but have changed tactics in recent years, preferring to go through middlemen in Mexico, authorities said. The group sold most of the drugs in economically depressed cities such as Compton, Bell Gardens, Pico Rivera, Inglewood, and in parts of Los Angeles. During the investigation, authorities confiscated about 60 pounds of cocaine, 380 pounds of marijuana, $35,000 in cash, and 3 guns.

Source: *Associated Press,* 3 November 2000.

Wholesale

The Los Angeles HIDTA reports that cocaine consumption, storage, and distribution are widespread. While most of the 156 identified DTOs operating within the region are Mexican criminal polydrug organizations, 99 traffic predominantly in cocaine. The most prevalent cocaine smuggling organization is the Arellano-Felix organization.

In response to intense law enforcement pressure, DTOs have redesigned their operations and are storing bulk shipments of cocaine outside the district in towns along the Southwest Border. Although many DTOs have shifted some of their trafficking functions to locations outside the district, the organizations still maintain a presence within the area.

At the local level, the Los Angeles Police Department reports encountering smaller trafficking groups that operate in a similar manner. Once the cocaine is stored, these groups usually pick up only the amount of cocaine needed for a specific transaction. This reduces the chance that large quantities will be seized at one time.

According to Los Angeles HIDTA reporting, over the last few years Colombian DTOs have relinquished some control of cocaine distribution to Mexican criminal groups. However, an increased presence of Colombian groups recently has been noted. Colombians again are becoming more directly involved with major cocaine and money laundering operations. Colombian criminal groups are handling drugs and money using a single trafficking cell, whereas historically, each facet—trafficking, transportation, and money pickup—was the responsibility of separate cells. (See text box below.) One possible explanation for this resurgence is that the Colombian DTOs have come to realize that they relinquished too much control to the Mexican criminal groups and are attempting to recapture control of cocaine distribution. According to several published articles in Mexico and the United States, instability within the Arellano-Felix organization, a longtime partner of the Colombian cartels, may be another factor.

Inside Colombian DTOs: Colombian DTOs in the United States are organized into compartmented "cells" that operate within a given geographic area. Some cells specialize in a particular facet of the drug trade, such as cocaine transport, storage, wholesale distribution, or money laundering. Each cell, which may be composed of 10 or more employees, operates with little or no knowledge about the membership in, or drug operations of, other cells. The head of each cell reports to a regional director who, in turn, reports directly to one of the drug lords of that particular organization or its designee based in Colombia. A rigid command-and-control structure is characteristic of these organizations. Trusted lieutenants of the organization operating in the United States have discretion in the day-to-day operations, but ultimate authority rests with the leadership in Colombia.

Over the past decade, Colombian DTOs have been paying Mexican DTOs with shares of cocaine shipments, sometimes as high as 50 percent, for smuggling the cocaine across the border. This arrangement allowed Mexican DTOs to distribute cocaine using their well-established drug networks. However, some Colombian DTOs are ensuring profits by selling cocaine at a reduced rate to Mexican DTOs in lieu of paying in-kind for transportation services. The Colombian DTOs also may be expanding their cocaine trafficking operations in the Los Angeles area to increase profits. In essence, the Colombians are seeking to maximize the return on their investment in cocaine and increase their market share.

The Sinaloan Cowboys, a midlevel Mexican drug trafficking group, supplies cocaine to Los Angeles gangs. According to the FBI, trafficking and distribution activities within the Los Angeles Field Office's jurisdiction are controlled primarily by the Arellano-Felix organization and, to a lesser extent, the Carrillo-Fuentes and Caro-Quintero organizations. Further, the FBI Los Angeles Division indicates that Mexican DTOs have surpassed Colombian DTOs in

cocaine trafficking. The Mexican DTOs are mobile and rely on family members and close associates for drug transportation and transshipment services. The FBI estimates that Mexican DTOs are responsible for 70 percent of the cocaine smuggled into the United States.

The emergence of new encrypted digital communications presents a huge challenge for law enforcement. Cocaine traffickers use encryption devices, personal communication systems, cellular and cloned cellular telephones, and prepaid calling cards to conduct their illegal operations. With greater frequency, command-and-control elements are switching from standard telephones for daily operations to digital encrypted cellular telephones when placing key out-of-country calls. Both the USCS Los Angeles Area Intelligence Unit and the Los Angeles HIDTA report the use of encrypted communications equipment by Mexican DTOs. Some privately owned communications service providers are suspected of collaborating with traffickers by protecting their identities and notifying them of law enforcement inquiries.

Retail

In the Los Angeles area, cocaine is sold at the street level through a call-and-deliver system rather than open-air sales. Buyers order cocaine by telephone and distributors deliver it to the buyers' homes or other agreed-upon locations. The call-and-deliver system reduces the likelihood of large losses should law enforcement arrest a distributor. African American street gangs buy cocaine from midlevel Mexican criminal groups, such as the Sinaloan Cowboys. More often than not, African American street gangs use a nongang middleman to obtain cocaine from Mexican groups because of distrust between these groups.

Mexican criminal groups also supply Hispanic street gangs and the Mexican Mafia with cocaine. The Mexican Mafia is a ruthless prison-based gang with expanding drug distribution interests throughout Southern California and Arizona. The gang, composed of Mexican-Americans, originated in California more than 30 years ago but is active throughout the federal prison system. The gang uses extortion and violence to control its share of the drug trade. Some Mexican Mafia members are believed to be members of street gangs that have direct connections to Mexican criminal groups operating in Mexico and throughout the southwestern United States. The Mexican Mafia recruits street gang members to carry out retail distribution. This practice provides the gang with a means to extend its influence beyond prison walls.

The Mexican Mafia traffics in all drugs but focuses primarily on cocaine, black tar heroin, and methamphetamine. Law enforcement authorities report increases in drug-related violence in locations where the gang is attempting to take control of the local drug trade. The Mexican Mafia frequently delegates control of drug sales in certain neighborhoods to Hispanic street gangs and then demands tribute or taxes for this privilege. One such gang, the Columbia Li'l Cycos—a faction of the 18th Street Gang—operates in the MacArthur Park area near downtown Los Angeles. The Cycos gang distributes crack cocaine to independent street dealers and, in turn, exacts taxes for the right to conduct drug sales. The Cycos leader, who recently was indicted under the Racketeering and Influenced Corrupt organizations (RICO) statute, is also a member of the Mexican Mafia.

The DEA indicates that the street-level distribution of crack cocaine is being handled by Los Angeles-based gangs such as the Mexican Mafia, Bloods, Crips, and the 18th Street Gang. Los Angeles County has an estimated 1,350 gangs with 152,000 members. The FBI estimates that the 18th Street Gang alone has approximately 15,000 members. There are reports that the Crips and Bloods, rival African American street gangs, are joining forces to sell crack cocaine outside the Los Angeles area. This cooperation is attributed to the pursuit of drug revenues and is occurring

most notably among older gang members. Moreover, gang violence reportedly is decreasing in urban areas while increasing in rural areas as these gangs migrate from cities in search of recruits and new markets.

OMGs and Cocaine

In a recent ATF investigation, members of the Mongols' Southern California chapter were arrested for various crimes, including drug violations. Two kilograms of cocaine were seized as a result of the investigation. While federal agents and Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies made the arrests in Southern California, search warrants were also executed at Mongols' chapters in Georgia and Oklahoma.

Methamphetamine

The production, availability, and use of methamphetamine are significant threats to the Central District. Methamphetamine use in the district remains at high levels. From 1997 to 1999, the price and amount of methamphetamine seized in the Central District of California increased. Although the purity levels of methamphetamine significantly decreased over the same period, recent reports indicate purity levels are slowly rising.

The Riverside and San Bernardino County area is referred to as the "methamphetamine capital of the United States." The Central District is classified as a major source because of the numerous methamphetamine laboratories located in the district. These laboratories range from superlabs capable of producing 10 pounds of finished product per cook to numerous small-scale laboratories yielding only nominal user quantities. Most of the superlabs in the area are operated by Mexican DTOs. In response to increased law enforcement pressure, some larger methamphetamine operations are being relocated to areas outside the district.

Mexican DTOs also use the district as both a destination and transshipment point for methamphetamine produced in Mexico and smuggled into the United States. Mexican DTOs and criminal groups control methamphetamine wholesale and retail distribution, sometimes using street gangs and other street level dealers.

Crystal methamphetamine (ice) is available in the region. Ice is a purer, more potent form of the drug with purity levels estimated between 85 and almost 100 percent. Mexican DTOs supply powdered methamphetamine to Asian criminal groups who convert it to ice. These Asian groups dominate the sale of ice, which sells for up to $30,000 per pound.

Seizures of Southeast Asian methamphetamine tablets ("yaba") in California and the availability of those tablets at Southern California nightclubs suggest that the use of Asian methamphetamine tablets may have already spread beyond traditional ethnic Asian users. Yaba (Thai for "crazy medicine") are methamphetamine powdered tablets manufactured in Thailand and Myanmar (Burma).

Law enforcement continues to dedicate a significant amount of resources to the methamphetamine threat. Methamphetamine incidents accounted for 41 percent (6,212) of drug-related law enforcement actions in the Los Angeles HIDTA's area of responsibility in FY1999. This represents a 23 percent increase over FY1998. Most methamphetamine-related law enforcement efforts were directed at laboratory operations.

Abuse

Methamphetamine is an odorless, bitter-tasting, crystalline powder that dissolves easily in water. Common names are speed, ice, meth, crystal, crank, fire, and glass. It is a man-made, addictive stimulant-hallucinogenic compound, which associates the properties of cocaine with those of LSD. Methamphetamine excites specific brain systems and has a high potential for abuse and dependence. Its use releases high amounts of dopamine, a neurotransmitter, which stimulates the brain and enhances mood and body movement. Methamphetamine can cause arrhythmia and ventricular fibrillation similar to symptoms experienced during a heart attack. It can cause weight loss and increases the risk of blood clots, stroke, and hyperthermia.

In the Central District, methamphetamine use remains high, but data from CADDS indicate that use may be stabilizing. According to CADDS, between FY1994 and FY1997, the number of amphetamine/methamphetamine admissions to treatment facilities fluctuated between 8,627 and 10,764. After a change in drug terminology, methamphetamine treatment admissions continued to fluctuate between FY1998 and FY2000. (See Table 2 on page 4.)

DAWN statistics for the Los Angeles–Long Beach area show a downward trend in methamphetamine abuse. The estimated number of ED mentions decreased 35 percent from 1,400 in 1994 to 910 in 1999. In contrast, ADAM reports increases in the percentage of male and female arrestees testing positive for methamphetamine: male arrestees testing positive increased from 5 percent in 1997 to 9 percent in 1999; female arrestees testing positive for methamphetamine increased from 9 percent in 1997 to 12 percent in 1999.

Availability

The U.S. Attorney for the Central District suggests that methamphetamine may soon surpass cocaine as the most readily available drug in the district. In Los Angeles, the average purity of exhibits analyzed decreased significantly from 66 percent in FY1997 to 44 percent in FY1999. This decrease may have been attributed to the inability of producers to obtain pseudoephedrine, the primary precursor chemical in methamphetamine production. In FY2000, the average purity of exhibits analyzed rebounded slightly to 52 percent. Although the purity of methamphetamine has decreased, its price has increased. The wholesale price rose from 1998 ($3,800–$4,000 per lb) to 1999 ($5,000–$6,000 per lb).

In Los Angeles, the amount of methamphetamine seized rose 158 percent, from 1,077 pounds in 1997 to 2,598 pounds in 1998. As of August 1999, the Los Angeles Police Department had seized approximately 719 pounds of methamphetamine, on pace for slightly lower year-end totals. The amount of methamphetamine seized in the Los Angeles HIDTA increased more than 668 percent over the same period, from 1,656 pounds in FY1997 to 12,729 pounds in FY1999.

The USCS collected data on methamphetamine seizures occurring at various ports within the Central District for FY1998 and FY1999. Similar to the upward trend for methamphetamine seizures in the Los Angeles HIDTA, amounts seized by the USCS increased 92 percent between FY1998 and FY1999. From 1998 to 1999, seizure totals at the Port of Los Angeles more than doubled, and seizures increased at airports in the district. (See Table 3 on page 5.)

Highly organized Asian criminal organizations and gangs dominate the sale of ice in the Los Angeles area. Japanese and Korean ice traffickers use Chinese-manufactured precursor chemicals to produce the drug and then distribute it. These Asian traffickers also distribute the drug in Guam and Hawaii.

Violence

Although Mexican criminal groups operate only a small percentage of all the laboratories in the area, they produce an estimated 95 percent of all methamphetamine available in the district. The absolute control of large-scale production and distribution by these Mexican groups reduces the likelihood of violence. However, rivalry at the retail level among Hispanic gangs creates the potential for isolated hostilities. For example, the Mexican Mafia was violently opposed by several gangs as it attempted to organize and control retail drug distribution. However, it should be noted that turf control, rather than drug operations, motivates most gang violence in Los Angeles. The small-scale individual methamphetamine producers have little reason to provoke violence because most of their methamphetamine is produced for personal consumption.

Methamphetamine addicts suffering the effects of prolonged or chronic abuse often display paranoia, memory loss, aggression, mood disturbances, and a tendency toward violence. Abuse and production of the drug have a negative impact on society. As a result of the proliferation of methamphetamine laboratories—especially home laboratories—law enforcement personnel and civilians, particularly children, are exposed to the dangers of explosion, toxic chemicals, and lethal by-products of the production process. In 1999, 548 children were residing at homes in the Los Angeles area in which methamphetamine laboratories were located. Mental health agencies also warn that methamphetamine abuse can be directly associated with spousal and child abuse, domestic violence, and homicide.

Production

The U.S. Attorney for the Central District indicates that domestic methamphetamine laboratories pose the greatest drug threat to the district. Within the district, methamphetamine is produced in large- and small-scale laboratories. Mexican DTOs dominate large-scale production. The high possibility of explosion, fire, toxic fumes, and ground or water contamination render all methamphetamine laboratories a very serious threat to public safety and the environment.

Superlabs in the district are capable of producing in excess of 10 pounds of finished methamphetamine per cook. In these superlabs, production only takes 2 days to complete. These laboratories are controlled predominantly by Mexican DTOs and often are located in rural areas outside Riverside and San Bernardino. Mexican DTOs control large-scale operations in Orange County and dominate all drug trafficking activities in this area. Superlabs also are located just across the border in Mexico, and the methamphetamine produced at these locations is transported into the district via land routes.

The Mexican Attorney General's Office reported that 17 clandestine synthetic drug laboratories were dismantled in Michoacan, 11 in 1999 and 6 in the first 4 months of 2000. Although the report did not identify the drugs produced, it is believed that most were methamphetamine.

In June 2000, a superlab in Riverside County was discovered in a rural area 3 miles west of Perris. Nearly 400 pounds of methamphetamine were seized, making it one of the county's largest laboratory seizures during the year. The methamphetamine was in powder, paste, and liquid forms. The operation, considered complex, produced large amounts of methamphetamine destined for distribution in the eastern United States. The cost for cleaning up ground contamination from residual chemical by-products released at this laboratory site was estimated at $60,000. Mexican criminals were suspected of operating the laboratory.

The Los Angeles HIDTA reports the existence of smaller laboratories, often referred to as "stovetop laboratories," that produce only nominal user quantities. These laboratories can be set up with minimal equipment anywhere a heating source exists; building and operating one of these small laboratories require only a fundamental knowledge of chemistry. "Dirt lab" production is another trend reported in the district. Hardcore drug users process the dirt and the dumped or spilled finished product found at abandoned methamphetamine laboratories to extract the chemicals needed to produce methamphetamine.

Local police departments report that the number of methamphetamine laboratories continues to increase; they classify methamphetamine as the drug posing the greatest threat to safety and security within their respective jurisdictions. The chemicals used to produce methamphetamine are extremely flammable and toxic. Frequently, these laboratories explode, catch fire, or release poisonous gas requiring specially trained personnel to remove the laboratory and clean up the site. Every pound of methamphetamine produced yields up to 5 pounds of toxic waste. This waste often is dumped into waterways or sewage systems. In 1999, the state of California spent almost half of its budget for remediation of laboratory sites to decontaminate areas in the Central District.

Another problem facing the Central District is the trafficking of precursor and essential chemicals. Mexican DTOs safeguard precursor chemical acquisition in much the same way that they safeguard other facets of their drug operations. Some of the precursor chemicals used in the production of methamphetamine include pseudoephedrine, red phosphorus, fluorocarbons, and iodine. Producers also frequently use dietary supplements DMSO (dimethylsulfone) and MSM (methylsulfonylmethane) to cut the finished product.

Federal and state regulations make the purchase of precursor and essential chemicals within the United States increasingly difficult, forcing Mexican DTOs to obtain precursors from other countries. Many precursors for methamphetamine production are smuggled from Mexico but Mexico is now believed to be a secondary source of

Methamphetamine Production Methods

Red Phosphorus or "Mexican": Primary chemicals are ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, hydriodic acid, and red phosphorus. Normally used by Mexican drug trafficking groups or cookers trained by Mexican traffickers to produce larger amounts of d-methamphetamine.

Cold Cook: Requires ephedrine, iodine, and red phosphorus. Chemicals are mixed in a plastic container, where methamphetamine oil precipitates into another plastic container through a tube attached to each cup. The mixture is typically heated by sunlight or by burying the containers in hot sand to produce small quantities of high quality d-methamphetamine.

Nazi: Primary chemicals are sodium or lithium metal and ephedrine. Normally produces up to ounce quantities of high quality methamphetamine. Frequently used by independent Caucasian methamphetamine cookers.

P2P: Requires phenyl-2-propanone and aluminum in a complex process that produces low quality d-methamphetamine. Normally associated with outlaw motorcycle gangs.

supply. The major source countries for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are China, India, Poland, and Germany.

In addition to the tightening supply of methamphetamine precursor chemicals, stringent regulation of these chemicals resulted in increased prices on the black market. One such example is iodine, which costs about $1,995 per 50 kilograms on the open market compared to the black market price of $9,000 to $9,500. The most recent prices reported by the Narcotic Information Network (NIN) in San Diego are shown in Table 4.

Since large quantities of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are not readily available in the area, methamphetamine producers and precursor "brokers" are forced to purchase products containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine over the counter elsewhere, smuggle the chemicals into the region from Mexico, or obtain them from unscrupulous chemical companies. These criminal broker organizations may also extract the ephedrine or pseudoephedrine from combination products such as cold medicines.

In Operation Mountain Express, DEA agents arrested several people in a network shipping multiton quantities of pseudoephedrine tablets to California. The operation resulted in the seizure of $8 million, 10 metric tons of pseudoephedrine tablets (capable of producing as much as 8.2 metric tons of methamphetamine), 83 pounds of methamphetamine, and 136 pounds of chemical solvents and reagents.

The DEA and Los Angeles HIDTA report that Mexican criminals are attempting to relocate their methamphetamine laboratories to northern California, Mexico, or western Arizona because of law enforcement pressure in the district. This trend is supported by increasing Operation Pipeline stops in northern California and decreasing seizures of large capacity laboratories in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

Table 4. Precursor and Essential Chemical Prices, Central District of California, March 2001

Precursor and Essential Chemical Prices Reported by NIN, San Diego

Ephedrine	**lb**	**$2,500–$3,000**
Ephedrine	**55 lb**	**$50,000–$80,000**
Freon R11	**5 Gallons (100 lb)**	**$1,000–$2,500**
Hydriodic Acid	**Gallon**	**$3,000–$3,200**
Iodine	**lb**	**$100–$200**
Iodine	**50 kg**	**$9,000–$9,500**

Precursor Prices Reported by DEA San Diego Field Division

Red Phosphorus	**50 lb**	**$5,000**
L-ephedrine	**Barrel U.S.C.**	**$70,000–$120,000**
Pseudoephedrine Pills	**Case (144 Bottles)**	**$2,500**

Source: San Diego/Imperial County Regional Narcotic Information Network and DEA San Diego Field Division.

Transportation

The Central District is a transshipment point for methamphetamine produced in the district and Mexico. The drug is shipped to a number of other states including Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, and New Jersey. Just across the border in Mexico, Mexican criminals produce methamphetamine in large-scale laboratories and transport the drug over the same land routes mentioned in the Cocaine section of this report. These principal smuggling routes include Interstates 5, 10, 15, 40, and 405. Traffickers use personal couriers traveling on commercial airlines to move methamphetamine throughout the United States.

A variety of conveyances and concealment methods are used to smuggle methamphetamine into the United States. The most popular places of concealment in commercial and private vehicles include hidden compartments, air bag compartments, quarter panels, and gas tanks. USCS seized 21 pounds of methamphetamine concealed inside an air bag compartment and a front seat cushion of one car, 25 pounds concealed behind the rear seat of another, and 27 pounds from the gas tank of a pickup truck.

According to the USCS Special Agent in Charge/ Los Angeles Area Intelligence Unit's FY1999 Threat Assessment, the primary means of conveyance for methamphetamine entering the United States via Mexico is by vehicle.

In addition to private and commercial vehicles, drug traffickers use mail and package delivery services to move methamphetamine into the district. DTOs use these methods to move precursor chemicals into the Central District. One organization in particular ships pseudoephedrine from various states into Los Angeles, where it is placed in storage facilities to await distribution to various laboratory operators.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs and Mexican criminal groups control the sale and distribution of methamphetamine at all levels. Asian criminal organizations dominate the distribution of ice in the Los Angeles area. Hispanic gangs are the primary methamphetamine distributors at the retail level. Small-scale methamphetamine laboratory operators encountered in the district typically produce only enough methamphetamine for personal use and for a limited number of buyers.

Wholesale

Mexican DTOs are the primary sources of supply for methamphetamine in the district and dominate distribution at the wholesale level. According to a 1998 U.S. Attorney report, Mexican DTOs dominate wholesale methamphetamine trafficking in the United States because they have ready access to precursor chemicals in Mexico, they control well-established drug smuggling and distribution networks, and they produce large quantities of methamphetamine on a regular basis.

The FBI identified the Amezcua-Contreras organization as the most significant Mexican methamphetamine trafficking organization. Several key members of the Amezcua-Contreras organization reside and conduct business in the Riverside area. While there is evidence of a renewed interest in methamphetamine production by OMGs, Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are expected to continue to dominate methamphetamine production and distribution at all levels.

Highly organized Asian criminal organizations and gangs dominate the sale of ice in the Los Angeles area. Mexican traffickers supply Asian criminal organizations with powdered methamphetamine for the purpose of converting it to ice. The DEA attributes this trend to the Asian organizations' ability to produce high purity ice in large volumes.

Ice is smuggled into the United States in amounts up to 1 kilogram using express mail services and body carriers. The price of ice in the Los Angeles area ranges between $140 and $450 per gram, $5,000 and $8,500 per ounce, and $50,000 and $70,000 per kilogram. Analyzed samples of ice identified as d-methamphetamine hydrochloride revealed purity levels ranging from 85 to almost 100 percent. An increase in the availability of ice was also noted in Riverside County.

Retail

The increasing number of smaller independent methamphetamine laboratories and renewed interest by OMGs in producing their own finished product prevented total West Coast market dominance by Mexican DTOs. However, Mexican DTOs continue to dominate the methamphetamine trade because of their production and smuggling capabilities and their ties to Hispanic gangs, now the primary distributors at the retail level. The Mexican Mafia is expanding its influence over the street distribution of drugs, especially methamphetamine. There are indications that the gang is attempting to organize and orchestrate methamphetamine distribution by area gangs. Some other gangs selling methamphetamine in the district include Mac Mafia Crips, Playa Larga, Sons of Samoa, and East Side Longos in Long Beach and the Big Stanton, Varrio Chicos, and Varrio Mondena Locos in Orange County.

Heroin

Mexican black tar is the most prevalent type of heroin available in the Central District. Los Angeles serves as a major distribution center and transshipment point for Mexican black tar and brown powdered heroin destined for locations in California as well as other U.S. cities. Mexican black tar heroin is increasing in availability and purity throughout the district. South American heroin, produced and supplied by Colombian DTOs, is also available in the area. Although Southeast Asian and Southwest Asian heroin are transshipped through Los Angeles to the eastern United States, these types are not encountered as frequently by law enforcement.

Mexican DTOs control the production, transportation, and distribution of Mexican heroin. Most Mexican heroin is smuggled overland across the U.S.–Mexico border by individual couriers and moved into the district for local, regional, and national distribution. Heroin activity is high because the Central District is a major transshipment point for the distribution of black tar heroin destined for cities primarily throughout the western United States. The Los Angeles HIDTA documented 953 heroin-related law enforcement actions in FY1999, representing 6 percent of all drug-related law enforcement actions in its area of responsibility and just a 3 percent decrease from the 987 heroin-related actions reported in FY1998.

Abuse

Available drug use information indicates heroin abuse may be leveling off in the Central District. According to CADDS, heroin admissions, while accounting for 56 percent of total FY2000 admissions, declined 16 percent from 43,895 in FY1994 to 36,717 in FY2000. Though heroin treatment admissions declined annually between FY1994 and FY1997, treatment admissions in years since have remained relatively stable. (See Table 2 on page 4.) Injection remains the most common method of administration, although the percentage of those injecting fell slightly while the percentage of those smoking increased.

Drug-related deaths remained fairly steady between FY1993 and FY1996; however, there was a 27 percent decrease from FY1996 (397) to FY1997 (290). Opiate-related deaths represented 25 percent of all drug-related deaths during this period.

According to statistics from DAWN, the estimated number of ED heroin/morphine mentions for the metropolitan area of Los Angeles–Long Beach increased slightly in 1999 to 2,955 following a downward trend from 3,724 mentions in 1993 to 2,531 in 1997. DAWN ME data show the number of heroin/morphine-related deaths declined from 554 in 1996 to 444 in 1998, a decrease of 20 percent. Though the number of heroin/morphine-related deaths declined, the drug still ranked first as the primary cause of drug-related deaths in Los Angeles.

According to data from ADAM, the percentage of adult male arrestees testing positive for opiates in Los Angeles declined from 11 percent in 1990 to 6 percent in 1998. Female adult arrestees testing positive for opiates declined from 18 percent in 1990 to 9 percent in 1998. In the 1999 ADAM report, the percentage of female adult arrestees testing positive for opiates was 8 compared to 6 percent for adult male arrestees. These figures mirror those on the national level, where the median for adult female arrestees testing positive for opiates was 8 percent and the median for adult male arrestees was 6 percent.

Availability

Mexican heroin continues to be the predominant type available within the Central District. Both the availability and purity of Mexican black tar and brown powder are increasing. Mexican black tar is the heroin of choice in the Los Angeles HIDTA. South American heroin, primarily controlled by Colombian DTOs, is increasingly encountered within the district. Southwest Asian heroin is not frequently encountered in the district nor does the Los Angeles HIDTA report a significant Southeast Asian heroin user population.

The Los Angeles HIDTA reports that heroin purity levels fluctuate between 9 and 67 percent, and that most street-level samples average 25 percent. A rise in heroin purity over the last few years has led to an increase in heroin overdoses. The higher purity levels of Mexican black tar heroin can be attributed to Mexican DTOs increasing purity to maintain control of the market. The wholesale price of black tar heroin, however, has remained stable at $16,000 to $21,600 per kilogram.

The DEA Domestic Monitor Program reports heroin is increasing in availability and purity throughout the area. The average purity level for a gram of black tar heroin in the Los Angeles area increased approximately 7 percent—to 40 percent—during the first quarter of FY2000 and remained at that level during the second quarter.

A recent investigation revealed that one Mexican group was selling half-gram doses of black tar heroin—at purity levels of 60 to 85 percent—

for $10 per dose. This heroin was distributed not only in the Los Angeles area, but also throughout the United States. The DEA Los Angeles Field Division reports that an ounce of Mexican black tar heroin at purity levels of 33 to 67 percent sells for $850 to $1,000.

Southeast Asian heroin is available in the Los Angeles area for approximately $2,000–$3,500 per ounce. In at least one instance, Southeast Asian heroin, with an 88 percent purity level, was obtained from a Thai heroin trafficker.

While the amount of heroin seized in the Los Angeles HIDTA decreased 54 percent, from 52 pounds in FY1997 to 24 pounds in FY1998, seizures more than tripled to 78.6 pounds in FY1999. The amount of heroin seized by the USCS at ports in the district decreased 61 percent from 107 pounds in FY1998 to 51 pounds in FY1999, and increased 73 percent to 88 pounds in FY2000. (See Table 3 on page 5.)

Violence

The nearly total control of the heroin market in the Central District by Mexican DTOs supplying black tar and brown powdered heroin reduces the level of violence normally created by competition. However, there are still many instances of heroin-related violence within the district. There are no fewer than 51 different street gangs in the Central District that distribute heroin at the retail level. The Sinaloan Cowboys, a violent Mexican gang that controls some of the retail heroin distribution in the Los Angeles area, employs street gang members in the United States to commit assassinations and provide security for drug transportation.

Heroin users are generally nonviolent, but to support their habit, they often will squander savings and assets to purchase heroin. When all possible sources of income are exhausted, users may panhandle or become low-level drug distributors to support their addiction. Some even commit burglary and robbery to obtain the money needed to buy the drug.

Production

Opium is not cultivated nor is heroin produced in the Central District. The heroin that is transshipped through, and consumed in, the district is produced in foreign countries. Southeast Asian heroin is processed from opium poppies grown in the geographical area known as the Golden Triangle, which includes the countries of Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Thailand. Southwest Asian heroin is processed from opium poppies grown in the area known as the Golden Crescent, which includes the countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey. South American heroin is processed from opium poppies grown in the Andean mountain range in South America. Primarily Colombian traffickers control the processing and distribution of this type of heroin.

Mexican black tar and brown powdered heroin are processed from opium poppies grown along the spine of the Sierra Madre in western Mexico, from the tristate area of Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango to the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca in southern Mexico. The state of Michoacan is a significant source of opium and opium gum and a recent investigation identified the state of Nayarit as a production source. Although only about 2 percent of the world's illicit opium is grown in Mexico, nearly all of it is processed into heroin and

shipped to the United States. Estimates place Mexican heroin production in 2000 at approximately 3 metric tons.

Transportation

According to the Los Angeles HIDTA, the Central District is a transshipment point for the distribution of Mexican black tar and brown powdered heroin destined for California, the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest, and the Midwest. The Midwest and East Coast are destinations for Southeast Asian heroin.

Most Mexican heroin is smuggled overland across the U.S.–Mexico border by individual couriers. Heroin is smuggled through POEs, usually concealed in secret compartments in commercial and private vehicles. Heroin is commonly smuggled into Southern California from Tijuana via the San Ysidro POE, from Mexicali via the Calexico POE, and through the Otay Mesa and Tecate POEs. Interstates 5, 15, and 215 as well as various secondary roads in Southern California are frequently used by traffickers to transport heroin into the Central District where it is stored in stash houses and warehouses. Interstates 10 and 40 provide west-east routes used to move the heroin to markets throughout the United States.

Larger pound quantities are transported in vehicles via interstate highways while airplane passengers and backpackers transport smaller quantities. Concealment methods include the use of book covers, toys, and furniture. Heroin traffickers also use couriers who ingest heroin pellets as a way to transport heroin into the district and other areas. Mail services are also used and parcels are often delivered to post office boxes obtained through the use of false identification. The U.S. Attorney for the Central District reports that mail shipments are a significant smuggling method for all types of heroin.

A recent investigation provided insight into how Mexican DTO transportation cells move black tar heroin throughout the United States. A Mexican DTO grew opium poppies and processed them into black tar heroin in Nayarit, Mexico. The heroin was transported overland through Mexico and smuggled across the Southwest Border into Arizona and California. The heroin was then shipped by vehicle to Los Angeles, where it was placed in stash houses and eventually transported by courier to locations throughout the United States. The Mexican DTO employed juvenile females and 60-year-old males as couriers. Each courier transported 1 or 2 pounds of heroin per trip either body-packed or hidden in portable radios. In some cases, the heroin was packaged and shipped via mail services. Destinations for this heroin included Anchorage, Alaska; Phoenix and Yuma, Arizona; Bakersfield, Los Angeles and San Diego, California; Denver, Colorado; Atlanta, Georgia; Honolulu, Hawaii; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Cleveland, Columbus, and Steubenville, Ohio; Portland, Oregon; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Nashville, Tennessee; Corpus Christi, Texas; and Salt Lake City, Utah. The DTO also had distribution cells in Alabama, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Jersey, and West Virginia; however, these cells were not identified with any particular city in those states.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs, including polydrug organizations, and Mexican criminal groups control the distribution of Mexican heroin at all levels. Mexican black tar heroin is the predominant type found in the Central District. Although the district does not have a large Southeast and Southwest Asian heroin user population, law enforcement continues to encounter both types of heroin. South American heroin is also present in the Central District, but it is not known whether it is being distributed for use in the district or just being transshipped through the area.

Mexican criminal groups control the retail distribution of heroin in the Central District. In addition, African American and Hispanic street gangs play a key role in the distribution of heroin in some areas. Mexican black tar heroin is the most common type sold at the street level in Los Angeles.

Personal communication devices, such as cellular phones and pagers, have changed the way retail distributors sell heroin. Currently, the most common method of distribution is through a call-and-deliver system. Delivery service provides the dealer with fewer risks and greater control over the drug transaction than conventional open-air sales.

Wholesale

Mexican DTOs, including polydrug organizations, and Mexican criminal groups control the wholesale distribution of Mexican black tar and brown powdered heroin within the Central District. Heroin trafficking by Mexican organizations varies; methods of operation are different depending on the size, structure, capabilities, and resources of the organizations.

The Los Angeles area is a storage location and distribution center for kilogram quantities of Southeast Asian heroin. Los Angeles-area Thai, Sino-Thai, and Chinese traffickers control the distribution of the drug, and although many Thai groups trafficking Southeast Asian heroin have been dismantled, others continue to operate in the Los Angeles area. The U.S. Attorney for the Central District also reports that the most significant organization trafficking in Southeast Asian heroin is the Nwanko Nigerian organization.

According to DEA, there is no significant information regarding Southwest Asian heroin activity. Though the availability of Southwest Asian heroin is limited, Los Angeles is believed to be a transshipment point for distribution to cities across the country.

Operation Tar Pit–Wholesale Level

In the major DEA–FBI Mexican black tar heroin investigation Operation Tar Pit, heroin was transported to Los Angeles where it was stored in stash houses to await further distribution and transshipment. The black tar heroin was destined not only for markets in the West and Midwest, but also for those in the East. The Mexican DTO allegedly was competing with South American heroin traffickers by increasing the purity of its black tar heroin and underselling the South American product. This organization was estimated to be distributing approximately 80 pounds of heroin per month. It operated independently with no known ties to other trafficking organizations.

The Los Angeles HIDTA reports significant seizures of South American heroin in FY2000, but it is not known whether the heroin was destined for distribution within or beyond the Los Angeles area. The HIDTA also indicates Colombian heroin traffickers are attempting to expand operations and the USCS Los Angeles

Area Intelligence Unit notes that Colombian traffickers are becoming central players in the heroin market. The Los Angeles Police Department made two large South American heroin seizures in the past year.

Retail

Mexican criminal groups dominate the distribution of Mexican heroin at the retail level. Open-air sales, the traditional method of selling heroin on street corners, are becoming much less common. The call-and-deliver system using phones and pagers is the preferred method for conducting heroin sales in the Los Angeles area. Buyers order by telephone and distributors deliver it to the buyers' homes or other agreed-upon locations. Most of these sales are conducted from private residences.

The Sinaloan Cowboys is identified as one of the gangs responsible for the retail distribution of Mexican heroin in the Los Angeles area. Members of the Cowboys are ruthless, very loyal to the group, and do not fear law enforcement. The Sinaloan Cowboys are profiled in the Cocaine section of this report.

African American and Hispanic street gang members in South Central Los Angeles also are heavily involved in the street distribution of the drug. These gangs generally purchase the heroin from Mexican organizations. Street retailers known as "runners" are assigned a route and deliver heroin to known buyers. Mexican black tar heroin is the predominant type distributed by African American and Hispanic gangs. The heroin is usually packaged in small balloons and is often kept in the dealer's mouth during deals. Some of the gangs distributing heroin include Los Pachucones, Diablos, and Demons in Riverside; East Side Longos, Insane Crip Gang, and Rolling 20's Crips in Long Beach; and the 18th Street Gang, Vatos Locos, and Devious Hoodlums in Anaheim.

Operation Tar Pit–Retail Level

In Operation Tar Pit, the Mexican DTO distribution cells developed a customer base by targeting heroin addicts at methadone clinics. Law enforcement observed the organization's distributors selling heroin outside the clinics from approximately 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. The transactions occurred at a rate of 1 every 15 minutes. Clinic employees reportedly were paid to send addicts to apartments or hotels where the addicts were provided with samples of black tar heroin.

Marijuana

According to the U.S. Attorney for the Central District, both marijuana and hashish pose significant threats, with marijuana being the most available. The Los Angeles HIDTA reports 1,473 marijuana-related law enforcement actions during FY1999, representing 10 percent of all documented drug-related events for the fiscal year and a 33 percent increase over FY1998 marijuana-related law enforcement actions.

Most of the marijuana available in the Central District is produced in Mexico, but cannabis is also cultivated throughout the district. Mexican marijuana is generally the least expensive because of its availability and lower THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content, which is approximately 4 to 6 percent. In contrast, domestically produced marijuana—particularly that produced from hydroponic indoor grow operations—has a higher THC content (24 to 26%) and is more expensive. High quality marijuana from Canada ("BC Bud") is also available.

Abuse

According to CADDS, marijuana treatment admissions increased 13 percent, from 5,284 in FY1998 to 5,961 in FY1999. Treatment admissions continued to increase in FY2000, as the number seeking treatment jumped 9 percent, to 6,494. (See Table 2 on page 4.)

This increase, however, is nowhere near the rate of increase found on the national level. DAWN reports that the estimated number of ED marijuana/hashish mentions for the metropolitan area of Los Angeles–Long Beach remained relatively stable from 1993 (1,745) to 1995 (1,706). However, since 1995, ED mentions more than tripled to 5,473 in 1999.

ADAM reports the percentage of adult male arrestees testing positive for marijuana in Los Angeles increased from 19 percent in 1990 to 32 percent in 1999. Over that same period, the percentage of adult female arrestees testing positive for marijuana increased as well, from 10 percent to 21 percent. Despite these increases, Los Angeles ranked below the national average in 1999 for both male (40%) and female (25%) adult arrestees testing positive for marijuana/hashish.

Availability

Marijuana is readily available throughout the Central District. The Los Angeles HIDTA reports that the THC content for Mexican marijuana ranges between 4 and 6 percent, while domestic marijuana's THC content reaches levels as high as 26 percent. The DEA Los Angeles Field Division reports that marijuana of Canadian origin, with a potency of up to 28 percent, is readily available in Los Angeles.

The wholesale prices of low-grade Mexican marijuana and high-grade domestic marijuana have remained stable. Mexican marijuana typically sells for between $330 and $500 per pound. The price of domestically produced marijuana ranges between $2,550 and $6,000 per pound. BC Bud, a hybrid type of cannabis grown in British Columbia, Canada, sells for approximately $6,000 per pound.

At the street level, the retail price for Mexican marijuana in the Los Angeles HIDTA ranges between $60 and $80 per ounce; the price for domestic midgrade marijuana (4–10% THC) ranges between $200 and $250 per ounce; and the price of domestic marijuana ranges between $400 and $600 per ounce. The DEA Los Angeles Field Division reports the same prices.

The amount of marijuana seized in the Los Angeles HIDTA decreased by 18 percent, from 7,959 pounds in FY1997 to 6,459 pounds in FY1998. However, the amount of marijuana seized climbed to 7,724 pounds in FY1999, a 20 percent increase.

The USCS reports an increase in the amount of marijuana seized at ports in the Central District from FY1998 to FY1999. In fact, port seizures more than doubled from 8,930 pounds to 18,509 pounds over this period. The Port of Los Angeles accounted for the highest volume of marijuana seizures within the Los Angeles HIDTA. Of particular interest, however, is an apparent shift of activity to smaller ports within the area. During FY2000, the amount of marijuana seized at the ports of Hueneme and San Luis increased, while that seized at LAX and the Port of Los Angeles decreased. (See Table 3 on page 5.)

Violence

There does not appear to be any evidence of violence related to the control of marijuana distribution within the district with the exception of the some gangs that distribute marijuana and other drugs at the retail level. Marijuana users are not prone to violence; however, outdoor cannabis growers sometimes use violent countermeasures to protect their crops. Some of these countermeasures include hanging fishhooks from tree branches, using animal traps and explosive devices, and stationing armed guards to intimidate and deter people from entering areas where cannabis is grown. U.S. Forest Service agents have reported exchanging gunfire with cannabis growers.

Indoor cannabis growers sometimes use countersurveillance measures to detect law enforcement activity. However, countermeasures that inflict physical harm on others have not been encountered with any regularity.

Production

Mexican cocaine organizations smuggle multiton quantities of marijuana into the United States and through the Central District. Large-scale domestic cannabis operations (in excess of 1,000 plants) have been encountered by law enforcement in suburban residential areas as well as in national forests. In 1999, a record 53,394 cannabis plants were discovered at 19 grow sites in the San Bernardino National Forest. The largest of these operations was a 23,000-plant grow discovered in August 1999. A U.S. Forest Service official estimated the grow to be 3 years old.

Mexican DTOs run large-scale cannabis operations in the national forests of the Central District, sending crews from Mexico to tend cannabis crops. They also hire illegal immigrants to manage and watch over the cannabis cultivation sites.

Techniques in Cannabis Cultivation

Supercropping enables cannabis growers to double or triple their yield. This technique is cause for concern because current federal laws focus on the number of plants seized; 100 plants is the threshold for the mandatory minimum sentence. Supercropping allows cannabis growers to achieve a higher yield while staying under the 100-plant threshold.

Aeroponics is another relatively new method used to cultivate cannabis. Cannabis plants are suspended in the air by attaching the stems to some type of structure. Sprayers, similar to those found in the produce departments of supermarkets, are used to spray nutrients onto the roots. Timers are used to turn the sprayers on and off at set intervals.

Another advance in indoor cannabis cultivation is the manipulation of growing room conditions through the use of computers and multitask automatic controllers. Computers can be used to monitor development of the plants and environmental factors such as light, water, and temperature. Computers can also be used to maintain cultivation records and store customer information. Multitask automatic controllers are powered by electricity and usually are fully programmable, with timers and sensors to monitor and control the grow environment. The automated process is more economical and easier to use. Programmable controllers require less manpower during the growing phase and minimal oversight for the entire operation. Moreover, computers can be accessed from separate, remote sites, allowing cannabis growers to distance themselves from the growing operation.

The growers make camp near the plots and live onsite until harvest is completed. Cultivating cannabis in remote areas of national forests reduces the risks and costs associated with smuggling marijuana across the Southwest Border. The use of public lands to cultivate cannabis is appealing to domestic growers because the risk of asset forfeiture is substantially minimized.

The Los Angeles HIDTA and the U.S. Attorney for the Central District report that domestic marijuana production threatens the district in several ways. There are social and economic costs of providing treatment and increased law enforcement. In addition, the existence of large-scale marijuana production sites in national forests endangers not only the wildlife and other natural resources but also the public. Visitors to national parks and forests run the risk of tripping boobytraps or encountering armed gangs that can lead to deadly consequences.

Transportation

Most of the marijuana encountered in the district is smuggled into the United States from Mexico. Commercial and personal vehicles are commonly used to transport marijuana into and out of the Central District. Marijuana is commonly smuggled into Southern California from Tijuana via the San Ysidro POE, from Mexicali via the Calexico POE, through the Otay Mesa and Tecate POEs. Interstates 5, 15, and 215, as well as various secondary roads in Southern California, are frequently used by traffickers to transport marijuana from Southern California into the Central District.

The availability of intermodal transportation provides a number of ways for drug traffickers to move drugs into and out of the district. California's extensive coastline, numerous coves, and major roads near the coast make maritime transport an ideal method of delivering marijuana and other drugs. The Los Angeles HIDTA reports that marijuana also may be transported by rail. Transcontinental and regional passenger rail lines and two major cargo rail lines service Los Angeles. Many of the regional routes connect the district to San Diego and the U.S.–Mexico border, while the transcontinental routes connect the district with other U.S. regions, Mexico, and Canada. There also are a number of regional and international airports in the district, including LAX, which is the third busiest passenger and cargo airport in the world.

Overnight mail and parcel services are also used to ship marijuana into and out of the Central District. By using commercial parcel services, smugglers can transport shipments practically anywhere with minimal cost and with the ability to track the status of parcels in transit.

Shipping via Parcel Services

In a federal grand jury indictment, 25 suspected members of a Los Angeles-based marijuana trafficking group were indicted on charges of bribing Federal Express (FedEx) employees to ship 121 tons of Mexican marijuana to the East Coast. The FedEx employees were allegedly paid $2,000 per week for their part in the scheme. FedEx trucks, planes, and warehouses were used to transport and store the marijuana. The group wrapped the marijuana in dozens of layers of cellophane sprinkled with laundry detergent and fabric softener to conceal the odor of the leaves.

The corrupt FedEx employees apparently packed the marijuana into FedEx boxes addressed to nonexistent companies. They then passed the marijuana packages to dealers parked along delivery routes. Destinations for the marijuana included hundreds of cities and towns across the East Coast. The alleged leader of the group was a Jamaican male.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups dominate the wholesale marijuana market in the Los Angeles area. Marijuana also is transshipped from Los Angeles to distribution networks throughout the United States. There is some evidence that wholesalers are trading BC Bud—pound for pound—for cocaine. Hispanic and African American street gangs are the predominant distributors of foreign marijuana at the retail level, while the domestic cannabis growers distribute marijuana in the Central District.

Wholesale

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups control most of the marijuana distribution in the Los Angeles HIDTA and although they compete with domestic cannabis growers, the competition appears to be nonviolent.

An April 2000 federal grand jury indictment revealed a significant Los Angeles-based Jamaican DTO dealing in Mexican marijuana. The Jamaican DTO transported marijuana from its storage location in Los Angeles to its distribution cells in the Northeast. It obtained its supply of marijuana from the Arellano-Felix organization and operated out of a Los Angeles warehouse for approximately 2 years. However, none of this marijuana was distributed in Los Angeles, primarily because of the inability of the Jamaican DTO to compete with gangs in Los Angeles that dominate the marijuana market. Members of the Jamaican DTOs transportation and distribution cells were arrested in California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York.

Retail

Street gangs dominate marijuana distribution at the retail, or street, level. Hispanic gangs sell methamphetamine, PCP (phencyclidine), and occasionally crack cocaine in addition to marijuana. African American gangs such as the Crips and Bloods traffic not only in crack cocaine but also in marijuana. Some other street gangs selling marijuana in the district include the Insane Crip Gang and West Side Longos in Long Beach, Big Stanton in Orange County, and West Side Verdugo in San Bernardino County. Although street gangs control retail distribution, law enforcement reports individual dealers also are involved in street-level sales.

Other Dangerous Drugs

Other dangerous drugs include stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, illegally diverted pharmaceuticals, inhalants, and anabolic steroids. The abuse of designer or club drugs is associated with all-night dance parties called raves and is gaining popularity in the Central District. Younger party crowds, mostly teenagers and young adults, abuse these drugs. The risk of overdosing is greater because users often mix club drugs with alcohol, other drugs, or both.

At the local level, reports indicate an increase in the use of designer drugs in the Hollywood and West Valley areas of Los Angeles. The sale of drugs such as ecstasy, GHB, and Rohypnol is spreading from rave clubs to open-air street markets.

MDMA

MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), also called Adam, ecstasy, XTC, E, or X, is a synthetic psychoactive drug with amphetamine-like and hallucinogenic properties. MDMA was patented in Germany in 1914 and was sometimes given to psychiatric patients to assist in psychotherapy. This practice was never approved by the American Psychological Association or the Food and Drug Administration. Users say MDMA, sometimes called the "hug drug," makes them feel good. However, the drug may cause psychological difficulties similar to those associated with methamphetamine and cocaine abuse including confusion, depression, sleep problems, anxiety, and paranoia. The physical effects include muscle tension, involuntary teeth clenching, blurred vision, and increased heart rate and blood pressure.

MDMA taken in high doses can be extremely dangerous. It can cause a marked increase in body temperature leading to muscle breakdown and kidney and cardiovascular system failure. MDMA use may lead to heart attack, stroke, and seizure as reported in some fatal cases at raves. Recent research links MDMA to long-term, possibly permanent, damage to parts of the brain that are critical to thought and memory. There is also evidence that individuals who develop a rash after using MDMA may suffer severe liver damage or other serious side effects.

In the Central District, MDMA is popular at clubs, raves, and rock concerts and is used mostly by people between the ages of 18 and 25. An increasing problem among users in the district is that many producers of MDMA use poor quality, dangerous substances during production. In Los Angeles, green triangle-stamped tablets sold as MDMA were laced with DXM (dextromethorphan), a common additive in many cough suppressants. Another variant selling as MDMA is PMA (paramethoxyamphetamine). PMA was responsible for several deaths in Florida and Chicago. Tablets containing PMA are stamped with three diamonds in the pattern of the Mitsubishi corporate logo.

One tablet of MDMA sells for $7 at the wholesale level and $10 to $20 at the retail level. The availability of MDMA increased in the Los Angeles area as evidenced by the quantity of seizures over the last year. On January 31, 2000, USCS inspectors intercepted 40,853 MDMA tablets at LAX. Less than 3 months later, U.S. officials made what was at that time the single largest MDMA seizure in the United States, when approximately 490,000 tablets were seized in Los Angeles. This record was broken on July 20, 2000, when 2.1 million MDMA tablets—with an estimated street value of $40 million—were seized at LAX on a plane arriving from Paris, France. The group responsible for this shipment was linked to several other large seizures around the world, including 700 pounds of MDMA found by USCS agents in 1999.

Nationally, the availability of MDMA skyrocketed during the mid- to late-1990s. In 1993, only 196 MDMA tablets were sent to DEA laboratories for analysis compared with 143,600 tablets in 1998. Within the first 5 months of 1999, this number exceeded 216,000. USCS seizure amounts increased slightly from 370,000 MDMA tablets in 1997 to 380,000 tablets in 1998, before climbing to over 950,000 tablets in the first 5 months of 1999.

More than 95 percent of the MDMA available in the Los Angeles area is produced in and shipped from European countries, particularly the Netherlands, via air and sea routes. Israeli organized crime syndicates control most of the European market and are the primary source for distribution groups in the United States. They smuggle MDMA tablets via couriers aboard commercial flights, through express mail services, or in airfreight shipments. Rather than being shipped directly from Europe, some MDMA tablets are now sent to the United States via Mexico. Once in Mexico, the tablets are smuggled across the U.S.–Mexico border by couriers. Although Israeli groups control most distribution, the Russian Mafia also is involved in the shipment of MDMA into the district.

In the USCS investigation Operation Paris Express, a Los Angeles-based MDMA trafficking organization was dismantled. The alleged leader of the organization was an Israeli émigré who had resided in Southern California since 1985. The organization allegedly smuggled in excess of 9 million MDMA tablets into the United States over a 3-year period. Nearly 650,000 MDMA tablets were seized as a result of the investigation. The alleged source of supply for this organization was a Dutch chemist who produced the MDMA in Europe; senior members of the MDMA trafficking organization often traveled to Amsterdam or Brussels to pick up the tablets. The organization employed 30 to 50 couriers who posed as tourists or business executives to smuggle quantities of MDMA into the United States from Paris. The couriers included cocktail waitresses, exotic dancers, and couples with blue-collar backgrounds. Couriers were compensated for smuggling services with a paid vacation to France and $10,000 to $15,000 cash. Lieutenants of this organization told the couriers what to wear and provided them with cover stories. The couriers were photographed so other organization members could recognize them when they arrived in Europe. False-bottomed luggage was the method of concealment. Couriers were arrested in Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, and New York.

Ecstasy Rave Bust: Riverside County Officials Seize Drugs, Cash, and Arrest Five

Investigators arrested five people, including a rave party promoter, and seized $2.5 million in cash and hundreds of pounds of MDMA. The arrests, which took place around Los Angeles County in November 2000, ended a 10-month investigation by the Inland Regional Narcotics Enforcement Team based in Los Angeles County.

Source: *Associated Press,* 4 November 2000.

GHB

GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), also known as liquid ecstasy, scoop, grievous bodily harm, and Georgia home boy, is abused for its euphoric, sedative, and anabolic effects; however, use can cause insomnia, anxiety, tremors, sweating and induce coma. When GHB is combined with methamphetamine, there is an increased risk of seizure. Overdoses can occur quickly; some of the effects include drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, loss of consciousness, impaired breathing, and death. GHB is cleared from the body quickly and may be difficult to detect in emergency rooms and other treatment facilities. The drug is increasingly implicated in poisonings, overdoses, date rapes, and fatalities. GHB can be made from easily obtainable ingredients, one of which is GBL (gamma-butyrolactone), a solvent commonly used as a paint stripper. GHB can be produced in the home with commonly available ingredients using recipes often found on Internet sites.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department successfully prosecuted 3 people for drugging and raping 10 women and poisoning 6 others. The victims were enticed to unknowingly drink GHB in beverages such as cinnamon-flavored liqueurs, Long Island ice teas, or margaritas to cover the unpleasant, salty taste associated with GHB.

GHB and Date Rape

GHB has been used as a date rape drug. GHB, when slipped into an alcoholic drink, is used to incapacitate unsuspecting victims for nonconsensual sex. Because alcohol is a depressant, the toxicity of GHB is intensified, further compounding the victim's chances of having an adverse reaction to the drug. Recorded effects of GHB toxicity include seizure, respiratory depression, vomiting, amnesia, coma, and death.

According to the Community Epidemiology Work Group, GHB use is increasing in the Los Angeles area. The wholesale price of GHB ranges between $65 and $100 per 16-ounce bottle while GHB costs between $200 to $300 per gallon. The retail price of GHB ranges between $5 and $20 per capful. On February 14, 2000, the president signed a law banning the possession of GHB and placing it in the same category as cocaine and heroin under the Controlled Substances Act.

Use of GBL, a precursor of GHB, decreased recently. Publicity concerning GBL overdoses aided in reducing fatalities associated with use. While GBL is still present at raves, GBL is more frequently used at health clubs and sports bars to enhance muscle growth.

LSD

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) is a hallucinogen that induces abnormalities in sensory perception. It is odorless, colorless, and has a slightly bitter taste. LSD exists in more forms than ever before, most commonly in liquid, crystal, or gel form but also in blotter paper, microdots, gel tabs, sugar cubes, and liquid vials. Common street names are acid, boomers, and yellow sunshines. Effects are evident 30 to 90 minutes after taking LSD, although many users experience long-term effects called "flashbacks." Historically, LSD has been produced primarily in northern California. A small number of chemists in northern California produce LSD, which is distributed by close-knit groups of individuals using air and land methods.

LSD is readily available on college campuses and in suburban middle and high schools. Its popularity as a club drug increased slightly, but overall use remains stable. The strength of LSD samples ranges from 20 to 80 micrograms per

dose, much less than the 100 to 200 micrograms commonly reported during the 1960s and early 1970s. Since the mid-1990s, pricing and distribution in the Los Angeles area have remained stable. The price of LSD is $1,000 per gram at the wholesale level. Each dose of LSD costs between $1 and $5.

PCP

PCP was originally developed as an intravenous anesthetic. Use of PCP in humans was discontinued in 1965 because it was found that patients became agitated, delusional, and irrational while recovering from its effects. PCP is now illegally produced in clandestine laboratories and is sold on the street as angel dust, ozone, wack, and rocket fuel.

PCP is a white, soluble, crystalline powder with a bitter chemical taste. It can be mixed with dyes and may turn up in the illicit drug market as tablets, capsules, or colored powders. PCP may be snorted, smoked, or eaten. For smoking purposes, PCP may be applied to mint, parsley, oregano, or marijuana. PCP combined with marijuana is called killer joint or crystal supergrass.

PCP is addictive; its use often leads to psychological dependence, craving, and compulsive PCP-seeking behavior. Users cite feelings of strength, power, invulnerability, and a numbing effect on the mind. At low to moderate doses, physiological effects include a slight increase in respiration and a more pronounced rise in blood pressure and pulse rate. Respiration becomes shallow, flushing and profuse sweating occur, and generalized numbness of the extremities and lack of muscle coordination also may occur. Psychological effects include distinct changes in body awareness similar to the effects of alcohol intoxication. PCP use by adolescents may interfere with hormones related to normal growth and development and the learning process. At high doses, there is a drop in blood pressure, pulse rate, and respiration. High doses can also cause seizure, coma, and sometimes death. Long-term abusers may suffer memory loss, difficulties with speech and thinking, depression, and weight loss. PCP has sedative effects and, when mixed with alcohol or central nervous system depressants, may lead to coma.

The Los Angeles HIDTA reports a resurgence in PCP trafficking. African American street gangs based in Los Angeles are responsible for the production and distribution of PCP. Most of the PCP produced in the Los Angeles HIDTA is destined for markets outside that jurisdiction. Hispanic gangs also sell PCP at the retail level. The price of PCP remains stable between $6,500 and $8,000 per gallon at the wholesale level and between $125 and $175 per ounce at the retail level.

Rohypnol

Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), also called roofies, rophies, Roche, and the forget-me pill, belongs to a class of drugs known as benzodiazapines (Valium, Halcion, Xanax, Versed). Rohypnol is not approved for prescription use in the United States. Rohypnol produces sedative-hypnotic effects, including muscle relaxation and amnesia, and can also cause physiological and psychological dependence.

Rohypnol is odorless, tasteless, and dissolves in beverages. It can cause severe retrograde amnesia. The effects of Rohypnol are exacerbated by the use of alcohol, and even without alcohol, 1 milligram can impair or incapacitate a victim for 8 to 12 hours. Because of these characteristics, it has been used as a date rape drug.

Until 1998, Rohypnol was colorless and dissolved quickly in liquid. In 1998 the manufacturer changed the formula, adding blue dye and making it more difficult to dissolve so intended victims of sexual assault could more easily detect the drug in a drink. While these changes are discernible in a transparent container, they may not be detectable in an opaque or metal container. It has been suggested that the manufacturer modify the drug so that it is bitter to the taste.

Rohypnol frequently is used in conjunction with other drugs at raves. Although importation into the United States is banned, it remains readily available and inexpensive in Mexico—the primary source area. The retail price for Rohypnol ranges between $6 and $10 per 1-milligram pill.

During 1995, Rohypnol was widely available in the Los Angeles area. On January 1, 1997, flunitrazepam became a Schedule IV Controlled Substance in California. Since then, availability dropped significantly, especially on the streets of Los Angeles.

While Rohypnol is a popular teenage drug in other areas, in Los Angeles it is most commonly abused by hardcore heroin and cocaine users, who also abuse clonazepam, a drug similar to Rohypnol. Clonazepam is legal in the United States under the brand name Klonopin and in Mexico as Rivotril. These drugs enhance the effects of heroin and other opiates.

Ketamine

Ketamine or ketamine hydrochloride, also known as K, special K, vitamin K, kitty kat, and cat valiums, is commercially sold as Ketalar. It is an injectable anesthetic approved for both human and animal use. Ketamine is produced in liquid, powder, or pill form. Ketamine in its liquid form can be injected either intramuscularly or intravenously, but it can also be made into a tablet or powder by evaporating the liquid. In powdered form, ketamine can be mistaken for cocaine or methamphetamine and is often snorted or smoked with marijuana or tobacco products.

At high doses, ketamine can cause delirium, amnesia, impaired motor function, high blood pressure, depression, and potentially fatal respiratory problems. Low-dose intoxication from ketamine results in attention, learning, and memory impairment. Short-term use of ketamine causes hallucinations; its major effect is disassociation, which includes out-of-body and near-death experiences. Ketamine gained popularity among abusers in the 1980s when it was discovered that large doses caused reactions similar to those experienced with PCP. Ketamine abusers in the United States and the United Kingdom have reported incidents similar to bad LSD trips. While under the influence of the drug, they may believe they can fly or may attempt to get out of moving vehicles. Specific information for ketamine abuse in the Central District was not available.

Outlook

The Central District will continue to be a major storage location, transshipment point, and distribution center for drugs. Likewise, Los Angeles will remain a primary transshipment point for drug trafficking, as drugs are moved into the city and on to other cities throughout the United States. Traffickers will move smaller shipments of drugs into the district in an effort to avoid large-scale losses. High levels of drug trafficking activity will continue throughout the district, due in large part to its extensive transportation infrastructure and its proximity to the Southwest Border.

Cocaine and methamphetamine will continue to be the area's primary drug threats, with Mexican DTOs and criminal groups remaining the primary smugglers and wholesale distributors of cocaine supplied by Colombian DTOs. The price and purity of powdered cocaine will remain relatively steady, and crack cocaine will continue to be distributed at the retail level by African American and Hispanic street gangs.

As the production and distribution of methamphetamine increases in the Central District, the dangers associated with the drug will grow exponentially. Methamphetamine production increases the potential for dangers not only to the cookers, but also to the residents of surrounding areas and to the environment. Local budgets will be squeezed by the costly cleanup of hazardous by-products.

Many large-scale methamphetamine laboratories will be relocated to areas outside the Central District because of intensified law enforcement efforts. Areas to the north and east of the district likely will see an increase in the number of large-scale methamphetamine laboratories. Smaller stovetop methamphetamine laboratories, however, will continue to operate throughout the district, since smaller laboratories are easier to assemble and more difficult for law enforcement to detect.

Mexican heroin will continue to dominate the heroin market in the Central District. The higher purity levels of Mexican black tar heroin may make it more attractive to new users, particularly young adults, who are open to drug experimentation. Heroin trafficking groups most likely will continue to use the district as both a transshipment point and distribution center. Colombian DTOs may make a greater push to establish South American heroin in the district. Most likely, Asian heroin will continue to be transshipped through the Los Angeles area to other U.S. cities, particularly via overnight mail and parcel services.

Marijuana smuggled from Mexico and domestically grown cannabis will continue to pose a threat to the district. Mexican marijuana will remain the most prevalent type available, though domestically grown cannabis is likely to increase in availability. Indoor cannabis cultivation will continue throughout the district. This, too, is likely to increase as growers attempt to produce more potent marijuana.

With the growing popularity of raves, the use of club drugs—particularly MDMA, GHB, Rohypnol, and ketamine—will expand throughout the Central District. The potential for an increase in the number of overdoses exists because these drugs often are mixed with alcohol, other drugs, or both. The erroneous perception that there is less risk involved with the use of club drugs is a significant obstacle in the fight against these drugs.

Violence associated with the activities of Mexican DTOs will continue in the district. The increasing presence of Colombian and Russian criminal groups could lead to confrontations among groups battling for control of the drug trade. Paralleling a national trend, DTOs will relocate large drug operations outside the district to increase profits in new, smaller markets and to escape intensified law enforcement efforts. For the same reasons, African American and Hispanic street gangs will expand to new markets in rural areas located throughout the district. The competition for new markets may result in gang violence emerging in smaller communities that have never before encountered such activity.

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