

January 2001



California

Northern and Eastern Districts

Drug Threat Assessment



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California Northern and Eastern Districts Drug Threat Assessment

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Preface

This report is a strategic assessment that addresses the status and outlook of the drug threat in the Northern and Eastern U.S. Attorney Districts 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 Northern and Eastern U.S. Attorney Districts of California.

California Northern and Eastern Districts Drug Threat Assessment

Executive Summary

Key characteristics of the drug situation in the Northern and Eastern U.S. Attorney Districts of California are the following:

- Methamphetamine is the most serious threat in the region, and there are no signs this will change soon.
- The state's proximity to Mexico and its extensive highway system enable groups from Mexico to dominate crucial aspects of the drug trade.
- Nearly every illegal drug is readily available.

Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies have faced the full consequences of the methamphetamine threat for years, but organizations dealing with health, social services, and the environment are just beginning to recognize its severity. While methamphetamine-associated violence is increasing, it is impossible to know the ultimate damage caused by this drug. The effects on users and on the children of those producing and using the drug create a critical social problem that affects this area and, increasingly, the rest of the nation. Operators of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories continue to dump toxic substances into rivers and watersheds, causing significant environmental damage. The costs associated with cleanup are outstripping budgets at every governmental level.

Northern California is home to some of the most productive farmland in the nation and the world. Waves of illegal migrants move northward to work the fields and sometimes participate in the production and transportation of illicit drugs. Close-knit family groups control drug movements from Mexico to Northern California and beyond. The extensive highway system facilitates drug transportation.

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*Northern and Eastern Districts of California.
Note: This map displays features mentioned in the report.*



California

Northern and Eastern Districts

Drug Threat Assessment

Overview

This report covers the Northern and Eastern U.S. Attorney Districts of California, hereafter referred to as Northern California.

Northern California is part of the most populous and diverse state in the nation. In July 1999, California had over 34 million people, about 14 million residing in the Northern and Eastern Districts. California's principal industries are agriculture, entertainment, manufacturing, services, and trade. In 1999, the per capita state income of \$29,910 was above the \$28,542 national average. In May 2000, the seasonally adjusted state unemployment rate was 5.0 percent, which is above the national average of 4.1 percent.

California's extensive coastline and border with Mexico, its busy ports and vast system of highways facilitate drug importation and distribution. The main interstates in Northern California are I-5 and I-80, and Highways 1 and 101 are extensively traveled coastal roadways. The Port of Oakland is the fourth busiest container port in the nation, and the San Francisco airport is the twelfth busiest in the world.

This region is a source, transit, and arrival zone for various illicit drugs. Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) produce methamphetamine

and cultivate cannabis in large quantities in Northern California. The interstate highway system facilitates the north-south and east-west transportation of these drugs throughout Northern California and the United States.

The Mexican DTOs that produce and distribute methamphetamine also transport and distribute other drugs in the area. Mexican DTOs dominate the distribution of large quantities of methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, and marijuana in Northern California. African-American, Asian, and Middle Eastern groups have developed a strong influence within the region. A wide variety of gang members and their associates are the primary distributors of illegal narcotics at the street level. Gangs use firearms and violence to protect their territories and supplies. Gang violence is increasing and is closely associated with the methamphetamine trade.

Hispanic street gangs and prison gangs are growing in number. Outlaw motorcycle gangs, primarily the Hells Angels, still have an active role in the methamphetamine trade. African-American gangs, located in urban areas, are often associated with drug sales in public housing. Recently, East Indian criminals have become more involved in retail drug sales and other drug-related activity in the San Francisco area. With some

exceptions, individual gang members conduct retail narcotics distribution on their own account rather than as part of a structured gang business.

The methods by which narcotics are distributed within the Northern California region are evolving. Intelligence indicates that most groups are now storing narcotics in smaller quantities at multiple locations. This technique minimizes seizures by law enforcement and reduces the risk of large-scale losses to criminal groups.

Methamphetamine. The most serious drug threat facing Northern California law enforcement is methamphetamine. Although more people are admitted to treatment facilities for heroin abuse, several factors make methamphetamine a more serious concern. The producers and the users of the drug are often violent. By-products of methamphetamine production damage the environment.

Heroin. Black tar heroin from Mexico is plentiful in Northern California, and prices remain low. Although the number of heroin treatment admissions is up, that number relative to total admissions for all illicit drugs is down within the region. With few exceptions, tightly knit Mexican groups control the transportation and distribution of heroin.

Cocaine. Cocaine use, of both powdered and crack forms, is steady in Northern California. Cocaine treatment admissions are up, and violence associated with crack distribution is a serious concern for law enforcement officials. The California Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE) reports that in San Joaquin County, crack is as serious a problem as methamphetamine.

Marijuana. Cannabis cultivation and marijuana use are widespread in Northern California. Because of the costs associated with surveillance and the eradication of cannabis, some Northern

California authorities rank marijuana as a more costly threat than cocaine.

Other Dangerous Drugs. The San Francisco Bay Area has a thriving alternative culture, which often includes the use of other dangerous drugs. LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) has been popular for many years. The increased use of “designer drugs” such as MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), commonly known as ecstasy, and GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate) is also of concern to area authorities.

Fast Facts

Northern California (Northern and Eastern U.S. Attorney Districts) (statewide data marked *)

Population (Jan 2000)	13.9 million
*Median household income (1998)	\$40,600
*Unemployment rate (2000)	5.0%
Land area	109,194.7 sq mi (175,732 km)
Shoreline	453 miles (729 km)
*Capital	Sacramento
Principal cities	Bakersfield, Fresno, San Francisco, Sacramento, Redding, Oakland, San Jose
Number of counties	49
*Principal industries	Agriculture, entertainment, manufacturing, services, trade

Methamphetamine

Methamphetamine has become, without question, the most significant drug threat in Northern California. Methamphetamine is cheap and available in large urban areas as well as in smaller rural communities. According to the Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA),

counties south and east of the San Francisco Bay Area have become a major hub for the production and distribution of methamphetamine. Drug trafficking groups operating in California supply much of the methamphetamine used in the United States.

Abuse

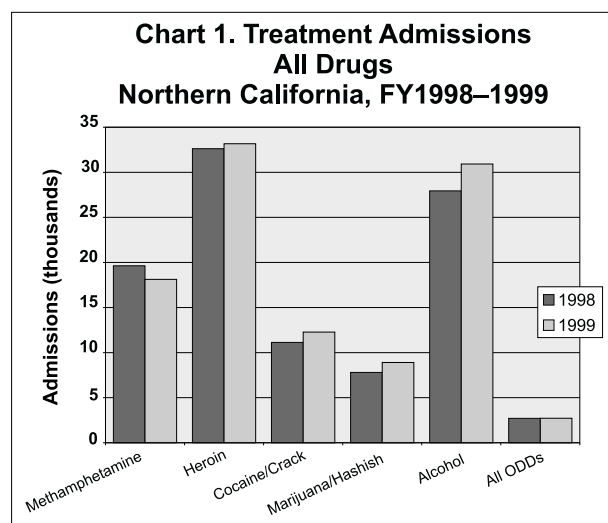
According to data from the California Alcohol and Drug Data System (CADDs), treatment center admissions in the counties of the Northern and Eastern Districts fell between 1998 and 1999 (see Chart 1). CADDs admissions for primary methamphetamine/amphetamine use more than tripled between 1993 and 1998–1999 in the five-county Bay Area. In San Francisco, the number in treatment for primary methamphetamine abuse in fiscal year (FY) 1998 was 1,140. This number is up by 19 percent from FY1997 and has more than doubled since FY1992.

Similarly, Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) methamphetamine ED mentions fluctuated during 1993–1997, then declined steeply during 1998 and the first half of 1999 (see Chart 2, page 4). According to John A. Newmeyer of the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinics in San Francisco, in 1997 and 1998, San Francisco had the highest rate of all DAWN cities in “speed” mentions per 100,000 population. Methamphetamine ED mentions fell to 4.9 percent of all drug mentions in 1998, compared with 7.5 percent in 1997, 6.6 percent in 1996, and 6.3 percent in late 1995. A possible reason for this decline is that fewer individuals were part of the ED populations since they had entered abuse treatment programs.

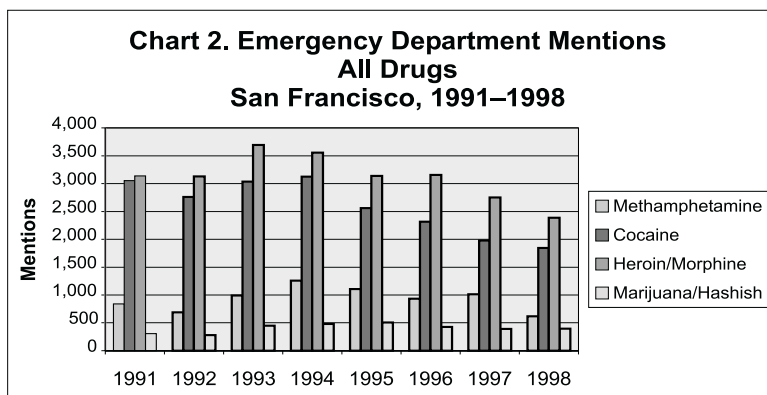
Arrests in San Francisco between 1993 and 1997 in the category dominated by methamphetamine showed percentage increases from year to year: 4, 12, 26, and 5 percent respectively. These arrestees were mostly Caucasian males. Sacramento and San Jose are the two Northern California cities

included in Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program collection. In Sacramento, 27 percent of males and 32 percent of female arrestees tested positive for methamphetamine in 1999. In San Jose, the respective percentages were 24 and 31.

Crystal methamphetamine or “ice” is a purer form of methamphetamine (averaging 90 percent purity) created by refining the extraction process. Abuse of ice is largely confined to ethnic Asian groups and does not appear to be spreading to other ethnic populations.



Source: State of California, Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, CADDs County-Level Report, April 2000.



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Drug Abuse Warning Network Annual Medical Examiner Data 1998*.

Availability

The San Francisco Field Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that methamphetamine is readily available throughout the region. In addition, the DEA Sacramento District Office and the Resident Offices in Fresno, Bakersfield, Oakland, and San Jose report the ready availability of large quantities of methamphetamine. Between October and December 1999, the low-end price of pound quantities of methamphetamine fell to \$3,500 from \$3,800 in the previous quarter (see Table 1). Ounce prices remained steady at a range of \$500 to \$1,000.

During 1998, methamphetamine purity levels in Northern California remained stable in some areas but decreased in others by as much as 30 percent. Some investigators have proposed three possible reasons:

- Law enforcement agencies and tighter regulations reduced the availability of precursor chemicals.
- Methamphetamine producers decreased purity levels in order to keep production in line with high demand.

Table 1. Methamphetamine Price and Purity

DEA Offices	Price Range (dollars/pound)		Purity Range (percent)	
San Francisco	3,500	to 10,000	4	to 90
Sacramento	4,000	8,000	8	100
Bakersfield	5,500	7,500	25	50
Fresno	3,500	5,500	1	15
Oakland	3,800		4	5
San Jose	4,000	5,500	29	34

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration, San Francisco Field Division, *Trends in the Traffic for the 1st Quarter FY2000: October–December 1999*.

- Unscrupulous precursor companies charged methamphetamine producers high prices for chemicals, thus driving production costs up and purity levels down.

In late February 2000, authorities seized over 20,000 methamphetamine pills in four shipments destined for the Sacramento area. All four

shipments originated in Laos. Usually methamphetamine pills trafficked by Thai or Laotian groups have been marketed to local Asian populations. DEA anticipates that these pills may become more popular among the general population, especially within the rave party scene.

Violence

Methamphetamine and violence—domestic violence and violence against society in general—have always gone hand in hand. Methamphetamine is a powerful stimulant that affects the central nervous system and can induce violent behavior, anxiety, insomnia, paranoia, hallucinations, mood swings, and delusions. Such violence poses a direct threat to law enforcement officers.

In April 2000, a man who police say had been taking methamphetamine and “acting paranoid” killed Vallejo Police Sergeant Jeff Azuar. Sgt. Azuar was shot when he and his partners tried to arrest the suspect on grand theft charges. The suspect fell out of a second-floor window after police shot him, yet continued to struggle with police, cutting one on the head. His “superhuman strength” was attributed to methamphetamine.

San Francisco Chronicle, 14 April 2000.

The methamphetamine trade is responsible for an alarming number of domestic abuse crimes ranging from child neglect to homicide. The paranoia that accompanies methamphetamine abuse has caused many users to assault and even kill family members. Adding to the domestic danger are the deplorable living conditions that characterize homes that have been turned into laboratories. Explosions in methamphetamine laboratories have caused fatalities.

Turf battles between rival methamphetamine distribution groups often fuel violence. Groups operating the large-scale methamphetamine laboratories increasingly found in the Eastern District of California are usually well armed,

and their laboratories are often booby-trapped. Weaponry, including arsenals of high-powered weapons and explosives, is commonly found at laboratory sites in the district. Criminal trafficking groups use violence to keep employees under control. Because there is no shortage of cheap labor in the form of illegal immigrants crossing the border from Mexico into California, drug groups often view their workforce as expendable. It is not uncommon for leaders to terrorize and even murder workers and their family members. Such violence is intended to quell both product thefts and cooperation with law enforcement and to increase drug production and distribution.

The Multi-Agency Gang Enforcement Consortium (MAGEC), formed in 1997, has had a dramatic impact on gang violence in Fresno and surrounding communities. MAGEC’s 80 members are drawn from participating federal, state, and local agencies; 50 members are assigned full-time. Gang-related homicides in Fresno decreased from 19 in 1997 to 10 in 1998, 2 confirmed and 2 possible in 1999, and 2 through May 2000.

Three children, ages 2, 6, and 9, were turned over to California’s Child Protective Services after Fresno County Sheriff’s Department detectives arrested the parents for operating a methamphetamine laboratory in their home. There was evidence the parents had poured toxic chemicals down the family’s bathtub drain. The parents, ages 23 and 26, were booked on charges of methamphetamine production and child endangerment.

Fresno Bee, 20 February 2000.

Production

Traffickers located in California produce a substantial amount of the methamphetamine available for sale in the United States. Despite law enforcement efforts and the enactment of the California Methamphetamine Control Act of 1996, which tightened regulation of and reporting requirements for methamphetamine precursor chemicals, methamphetamine production and use in Northern California are increasing at an alarming rate. Every federal, state, and local law enforcement agency in the area recognizes that the threat from the production of methamphetamine in Northern California is widespread and expanding.

Methamphetamine is produced in superlabs—which yield 10 pounds or more per cook—or in small, mobile laboratories yielding 1 pound or less per cook. Mexican DTOs tend to situate superlabs in the Eastern District because of its wide open spaces, access to major interstate highways, and relative proximity to Mexico, major West Coast cities, and the state’s principal precursor chemical supply companies. While only 16 percent of the clandestine laboratories seized by BNE task forces in 1998 were associated with Mexican DTOs, these accounted for 90 percent of all methamphetamine seized at laboratory sites. Operations of these Mexican DTOs are highly compartmentalized and only a few trusted associates have knowledge of the entire operation.

In 1998, BNE task forces seized and dismantled 1,006 clandestine laboratories, 60 more than in the previous year. Of these, 831 were methamphetamine and 166 were extraction laboratories; the remaining 9 laboratories produced hallucinogens, GHB, amphetamine, or hydriodic acid. Superlabs producing methamphetamine from pseudoephedrine, red phosphorus, and iodine crystals accounted for 99 percent of the drug laboratories seized in 1998. BNE seized 12,384 pounds of methamphetamine, a 71.5 percent increase over 1997. Statewide, El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) statistics show that law enforcement authorities seized 2,063 clandestine laboratories in 1999.

Many independent producers make smaller quantities—a pound or less per cook—in “stovetop” laboratories that can be set up almost anywhere: at home, in motel rooms, and in vans. They often make methamphetamine for their own use as well as for sale. Outlaw motorcycle gangs such as the Hells Angels are involved in low-volume methamphetamine production. Small laboratories are often located in urban areas, while the superlabs generally are located in isolated, rural settings. Recent events indicate this trend may be changing. For example, Modesto authorities report that in 1999 they seized almost 70 laboratories, at least 7 of which were high-capacity laboratories located in residential areas. The capacity of these 7 laboratories far outstrips the combined capacity of the others seized.

A Chowchilla police officer was checking on a rented van that contained methamphetamine-related chemicals when he noticed a man wearing only a plastic bag around his waist. The 22-year-old man claimed to be the devil and Jesus Christ. He led authorities to a large methamphetamine laboratory capable of producing 50 pounds at a time on a farm in Madera County.

Fresno Bee, 22 April 2000.

The continued supply of pseudoephedrine, other precursor chemicals, and glassware is critical, especially for large-scale producers. Brokers acting for producers purchase the chemicals and glassware from major chemical supply houses located primarily in the Bay Area. These companies have been responsible for millions of dollars in sales of chemicals and glassware to laboratory operators throughout northern and central California. The brokers then sell the chemicals directly to producers or to “mules” who transport the chemicals to laboratory sites. This method of operation often prevents law enforcement from identifying producers or suppliers.

A longtime Central Valley methamphetamine production group was crippled recently by 23 arrests, according to federal and local law enforcement agencies. The 18-month investigation centered on a group authorities called the Medrano Family. Officers in the multiagency task force served 30 search warrants and took eight children into protective custody. Among those arrested for conspiracy to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine were brothers Xavier, Javier, and Ernesto Medrano, all of Delano. The brothers are believed to be the second generation of the drug group started by their father. Authorities blame the group for methamphetamine distribution in northern Kern County and Tulare County and several drug-related, drive-by shootings over the years. In conjunction with the arrests cited, officers uncovered four superlabs in northern Kern and southern Tulare Counties that were capable of producing more than 10 pounds of methamphetamine at one time. Police seized about 16 pounds of methamphetamine, along with \$103,000 in cash, 7 vehicles, and 35 firearms.

Associated Press, 2 June 2000.

Pseudoephedrine tablets remain readily available in Northern California. Indications are that small liquor stores, gas stations, and mom-and-pop grocery stores are conduits for the movement of pseudoephedrine tablets in California. The tablets often are smuggled by Jordanian, Palestinian, or Yemeni groups who import the pseudoephedrine into California. Several law enforcement agencies report that California groups producing methamphetamine buy pseudoephedrine tablets from companies on the East Coast. These groups sometimes transport the tablets to Las Vegas, where they are stashed until they can be moved into California. The pseudoephedrine is sold to Mexican traffickers and local methamphetamine groups. Chemical suppliers, veterinary distributors, and feed stores sell the nutritional supplement DMSO₂ (dimethylsulfone, also known as methylsulfonylmethane or MSM) used to cut methamphetamine.

Methamphetamine production is toxic and dangerous, especially for inexperienced independent producers. Because of the difficulty in procuring nonflammable fluorocarbon, a solvent in the methamphetamine production process, many small-quantity cooks are using camper fuel to produce methamphetamine. This has led to a number of explosions and fires because camper fuel is highly flammable, and those who use it are not experienced at producing methamphetamine. Authorities in Modesto report that they have seized five Nazi-method laboratories in the past year, and that the theft of anhydrous ammonia, integral to the Nazi method, is rising.

Methamphetamine creates environmental hazards with enormous cleanup costs. Production of 1 pound of methamphetamine yields approximately 5 pounds of waste chemicals such as lye, red phosphorus, hydriodic acid, and iodine that contaminate land, streams and rivers, public sewer systems, and the walls and furnishings of homes and businesses. Cleanup costs have risen dramatically, draining the budgets of county, state, and federal governments as well as those of private owners. Many of the methamphetamine laboratories seized by BNE in 1998 were located in agricultural areas, resulting in the dumping of high volumes of hazardous waste on farmlands and in water sources. In the Central Valley, authorities have found barrels, glassware, hoses, and other waste from methamphetamine laboratories in irrigation canals. The damage done to local agriculture is unknown but believed to be substantial.

Often the value of the contaminated property is less than the cleanup cost and owners simply walk away from their investments. In FY1999, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control budgeted \$8 million for contractors to clean up clandestine laboratories and dumpsites. In FY2000, the Department of Toxic Substances Control responded to 2,006 clandestine laboratories and dumpsites and expects to exceed that number this year.

Central Valley authorities report that ethnic criminal groups that would not normally associate

in the past have formed loose alliances to produce and distribute methamphetamine. In some instances,

these loose coalitions have recruited violent gang members to be their enforcement arm.

From October 1999 to April 2000, a major Mexican production group purchased pseudoephedrine tablets from two separate Middle Eastern suppliers based in California. The group's methamphetamine production rose dramatically. The number of laboratories or dumpsites discovered also rose dramatically, to one per week compared with one per month previously. After the group was dismantled in April 2000, the numbers returned to their previous levels.

South Bay Meth Task Force Commander, interview by author, 31 May 2000.

Transportation

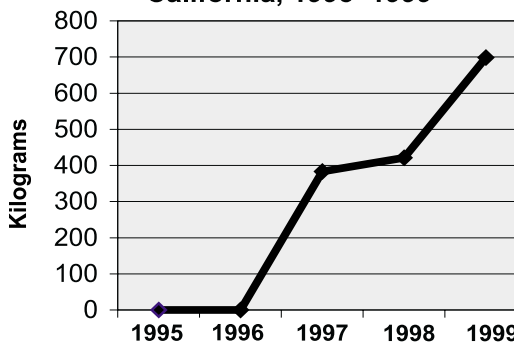
The Eastern District is a major area for transshipment of methamphetamine within California and to all sections of the country, particularly the Midwest and Southeast. Mexican criminal groups use the state's extensive highway system to transport methamphetamine.

Interstate 5 is a major pipeline for the transportation of methamphetamine and cocaine from the U.S.–Mexico border to Washington and Oregon. Approximately 50 percent of all highway seizures in California in 1999 occurred on this route. Many of these seizures took place in the counties just north of Sacramento. U.S. Highway 99 is another popular north-south roadway for transporters. Almost half of the nearly 700 kilograms of methamphetamine seized on all highways in Northern California was being transported to destinations within the state. From 1997 to 1998, methamphetamine seizures resulting from highway stops rose sharply, from 383 to 699 kilograms (see Chart 3).

All types of individuals transport methamphetamine. Mexican nationals transporting methamphetamine that originated in Northern

California have been arrested in Iowa, Illinois, Texas, Florida, and several other states. Mexican groups have recruited Caucasian couples of all ages to transport methamphetamine. For example, older couples with motor homes occasionally are used to move the drug from California to other parts of the nation.

**Chart 3. Seizures
Methamphetamine
California, 1995–1999**



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, El Paso Intelligence Center, Operation Pipeline, Seizure Statistics, 1995–1999, updated 23 February 2000.

Distribution

Mexican criminal groups generally control methamphetamine wholesale and retail distribution, although outlaw motorcycle gangs remain involved. Mexican groups use Hispanic street

gangs to distribute the bulk of the methamphetamine at the street level in both metropolitan and rural areas of Northern California. Hispanic gangs are established in all metropolitan areas of

the state and are starting to emerge in smaller, rural communities. The California Department of Justice estimates there could be as many as 170,000 Hispanic gang members in California, ranging in age from 14 to 41.

In Fresno, Mexican nationals who produce the methamphetamine sell it in pound quantities to both Hispanic and Caucasian retailers. Retail sellers cut the methamphetamine and sell it in gram-sized bindles (a folded piece of paper containing up to 20 dosage units of any powdered drug) from houses similar to “crack houses.” Members of the Fresno Bulldogs street gang distribute methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, and marijuana in the area. Street operations by local law enforcement have forced these sellers off street corners.

In the Sacramento area, the Varrio Gardens, Elm Street Gangsters, Tiny Rascal Gang, and Tiny Little Rascals are active distributors. Members of Hispanic gangs like the Broderick Boys, Nuestra Familia, and Northern Structure distribute methamphetamine in Sacramento County.

Hispanic prison-based gangs that operate inside and outside prison are active in methamphetamine distribution, especially the Mexican Mafia, Nuestra Familia, and Northern Structure. Nuestra Familia was started in the mid-1960s to protect imprisoned Mexican-American gang members from rural northern California from the Mexican Mafia, whose members come from urban southern California. Hispanic gangs join alliances according to their origin, north or south—the Norteños or Sureños. Recently, Sureño groups have moved into traditional Norteño strongholds such as Salinas, sparking violent gang clashes. Nuestra Familia created Northern Structure as a front to evade law enforcement scrutiny. Nuestra Familia and Northern Structure recruit new members by using the music industry to glamorize their lives.

Mexican groups also exploit the many undocumented aliens in California to distribute methamphetamine at the retail level. In more rural areas, local distributors purchase methamphetamine from larger-scale Mexican groups for resale.

Some of these same areas have other ethnic street gangs involved in methamphetamine distribution in addition to Hispanic gangs. In the San Francisco area ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese, and Samoan street gangs distribute methamphetamine as well as heroin, cocaine, and marijuana.

In San Mateo County, methamphetamine is usually sold indoors—for example at bars—by word-of-mouth advertising. Use of both powdered methamphetamine and crystal methamphetamine is increasing in the county. The majority of ice users are Filipino. The largest Filipino population outside the Philippines lives in San Mateo County.

Law enforcement reports the involvement of “skinhead wannabes” cutting and selling small quantities of methamphetamine. These white, independent dealers are making an increasing number of street-level methamphetamine sales in Modesto.

San Jose is the largest city in Northern California. Unlike other large cities in the state it has no institutional slums, blighted areas, or street methamphetamine dealers. Sales are usually made indoors, and are advertised by word-of-mouth, usually to friends or referrals. Sales may also take place in parking lots by prearranged meetings. A buyer walks up to a car window, drugs and cash are exchanged, and both parties separate quickly.

Most methamphetamine distributors in San Jose package their product in some form of plastic. This might include corners of small plastic food bags, corners of grocery bags, or small sheets of cellophane. Wholesale quantities (usually a pound) are shrink-wrapped in cellophane for distribution. Retail quantities are broken down further, and plastic tied off with string is the preferred packaging for final sale. Some distributors package powdered methamphetamine or ice in tin foil that is folded several times.

Approximately 90 percent of the cases investigated by the Santa Clara County Specialized Enforcement Team, a BNE task force, are methamphetamine-related. While Mexican national criminal groups operating superlabs produce most

of the methamphetamine consumed in San Jose, the major city in Santa Clara County, the number of small-scale laboratories operated by Caucasians is growing. Many of these small-scale operators obtain production information over the Internet. The capacity of these smaller laboratories ranges from 2 to 8 ounces per cook. Many of these operators consume much of what they cook, selling the rest to friends to finance their next batch.

The DEA San Francisco Field Division's Mobile Enforcement Team completed a deployment in San Jose in December 1999. The 3-month deployment resulted in the arrest of 65 suspects and the seizure of 12.2 kilograms of methamphetamine, 1.4 kilograms of heroin, 18 firearms, one vehicle, and over \$25,000. Of the 65 suspects arrested, 21 were members of a violent Vietnamese gang and 3 were top members of a violent Hispanic crime family.

A group calling itself the All Indian Mob is active in the San Francisco Bay Area. The group appears to have split into three factions, which operate out of Union City, San Jose, and Richmond.

Authorities estimate there are several hundred members. The groups consist mainly of East Indian males in their late teens or early twenties, often college-educated. Several members of these gangs have been arrested for illicit drug sales (mainly methamphetamine and marijuana), weapons trafficking, and trafficking in illegal immigrants. Members have been involved in several shootings and serious assaults in Alameda, Santa Clara, and Contra Costa Counties. Some members of these gangs may be aligning themselves with Norteño Hispanic street gangs for protection from rival gangs.

Wholesale quantities of ice are sold out of residences such as apartments or small houses in the San Francisco area. Bulk quantities of ice the size and shape of softballs are often wrapped in duct tape. Retail quantities of ice are typically distributed hand to hand on the street or purchased in a residence. Many crystal methamphetamine users prefer to use the drug immediately, so a house may serve as an "oasis" where the addict might use the drug.

Heroin

Heroin is the second most serious drug threat in Northern California. Black tar heroin from Mexico is plentiful in Northern California, and

prices remain low. With few exceptions, tightly knit Mexican groups control the transportation and distribution of heroin.

Abuse

CADDS data for FY1998 and FY1999 indicate admission totals for heroin abuse rose from 32,617 to 33,164 in Northern California counties.

Emergency department (DAWN) heroin/morphine mentions for San Francisco rose to 3,555 in 1994. By 1998, ED mentions had fallen to 2,386, below 1992 levels.

In Sacramento, according to 1999 ADAM data, only 4 percent of male and 5 percent of

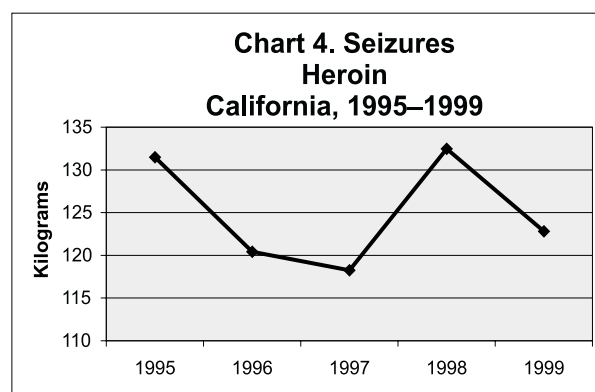
female arrestees tested positive for opiates of any kind. In San Jose, the percentages were 4 and 13 percent respectively.

Opium use is limited. It is reportedly increasing in the Central Valley region, although such use is largely confined to the Laotian community.

Availability

Mexican DTOs are firmly entrenched and supply the majority of users. Every District and Resident Office in the DEA San Francisco Field Division reports that black tar heroin is dominant and is easily obtainable and plentiful. Purity ranges from 20 to 60 percent. Prices range from \$15,000 to \$80,000 per kilogram (see Table 2). The total amount of heroin seized fell from 1995 to 1997, before notably increasing in 1998. In 1999, seizure amounts again fell to about the same levels as 1996 (see Chart 4).

Very little heroin from Southeast and South-west Asia is used in Northern California; most is transshipped to markets in the eastern United States and Canada.



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, El Paso Intelligence Center, Operation Pipeline, Seizure Statistics, 1995–1999, updated 23 February 2000.

Table 2. Heroin Price and Purity

DEA Offices	Price Range (dollars/kg)		Price Range (dollars/oz)		Purity Range (percent)	
San Francisco	18,000	to 80,000			20	to 60
Sacramento			600	to 1,800	6	80
Bakersfield			800	1,500	20	22
Fresno	20,000	48,000			25	50
Oakland			500	600	22	25
San Jose	15,000	17,500			17	41

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration, San Francisco Field Division, *Trends in the Traffic for the 1st Quarter FY2000: October–December 1999*.

Violence

Violent crime and property crimes are attributed to street gangs distributing heroin. These street gangs are involved in crimes such as assault, auto theft, bank robbery, carjacking, drive-by shooting, homicide, assault on law enforcement officials, weapons distribution, and home invasion in furtherance of their gang objectives and to protect their gang turf. Arrests for

heroin-related offenses numbered 7,214 in San Francisco County in 1998, a 10 percent increase over 1997 and the highest number in 6 years. However, few agencies report violence associated with heroin use, in contrast to methamphetamine use. In San Francisco, burglaries ascribed to heroin users decreased by 39 percent from 1993 to 1998 (11,164 to 6,831). There were 17 percent

fewer burglaries in the first 10 months of 1999 than in the same period of 1998.

The Northern Structure (also known as Nuestra Raza) is affiliated with the Nuestra Familia prison-based gang. According to the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office, responding to the NDIC National Gang Survey, members affiliated with Nuestra Familia and the Northern Structure sell heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine locally and outside California. Some members specialize in armed robberies. One gang member was suspected of masterminding a series of bank robberies in San Jose in which handguns—some with laser sights—and sawed-off shotguns were used. Police in Seaside apprehended other Northern Structure members who were using portable radios and police scanners and apparently planning a drive-by shooting in retaliation for an assault on

one of their leaders. Officers believe their plan was to use one car to lure officers from their normal patrol area, a second car to notify other members of the location of patrol units, and a third car to commit the drive-by shooting. In April 1997, California authorities reported 597 members and 144 associates of Northern Structure incarcerated in the California Department of Corrections.

In West Oakland, the Black Guerrilla Family, a prison-based gang, distributes heroin and commits violent crimes such as contract murders and robberies. The Black Guerrilla Family evolved from the 1970s radical prison movement in California, and is considered extremely violent. Upper-level African-American traffickers supply the Black Guerrilla Family dealers in West Oakland. These upper-level traffickers buy heroin from Hispanic gangs in southern California.

Production

Opium is not cultivated in Northern California nor is heroin produced. In rare cases, ethnic

Asians grow small plots of opium poppies in their backyard gardens for personal use.

Transportation

Los Angeles is a collection point and distribution hub for black tar heroin originating from Mexico—the primary type encountered in Northern California. Some groups transport heroin from the border directly to cities in Northern California. From there, groups transport the heroin to secondary hubs in the Central Valley. A significant portion of this heroin is destined for distribution in San Francisco. The South Bay Area is also an important secondary hub, specifically San Jose, Redwood City, and East Palo Alto.

According to Federal-wide Drug Seizure System (FDSS) data, heroin is transported predominantly on Interstate 5 and U.S. Highways 152, 101, and 128. In 1999, 8.7 kilograms of heroin were seized on Northern California highways. Most of the heroin seized during stops was being transported to destinations within the state. Many

of the Mexican DTOs transporting methamphetamine also move heroin and cocaine along the same interstate routes.

Established destinations outside California include Oregon, Washington, and other western states. Recent arrests indicate that black tar heroin is occasionally available in cities in the eastern United States. A group based in Nayarit, Mexico, smuggled at least 80 pounds of heroin a month by private vehicle across the border in Arizona and California, with Los Angeles as the major hub. From there, the group transported and distributed the heroin in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta. The group often used individuals it believed would not arouse law enforcement suspicions—young females or men in their sixties. The heroin, typically strapped to the bodies of the couriers, was handed off to other members of the

group upon arrival in the destination city. The group also used parcel delivery firms and the mail to transport heroin.

Asian DTOs have smuggled heroin concealed in containerized cargo shipments from Southeast and Southwest Asia into North America. Southeast Asian DTOs consist primarily of ethnic Chinese; others include Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, and Vietnamese. Southwest Asian DTOs include Afghan, Indian, and Pakistani criminals. Afghan groups use express mail services to transport heroin produced in Southwest Asia into California for onward transit as well as local distribution. While they prefer to operate with groups of the same ethnic origin, Asian DTOs will work with Europeans, West Africans, and other Southwest Asians. These organizations remain highly cohesive and difficult to penetrate because of their strong ethnic, family, and tribal ties.

Opium from Laos and Thailand continues to be seized in Northern California. From January 1998 to July 1999, a total of 2,151 pounds of

opium was seized in or bound for Northern California. During a 10-day period between June and July 1999, the U.S. Customs Service seized over 800 pounds of opium at its Oakland mail facility. Most of the opium was seized from parcels originating in Laos or Thailand and ultimately destined for Northern California and the Central Valley. According to U.S. Customs, opium shipped by mail to the San Francisco area from Laos and Thailand is usually destined for Laotian communities in the Central Valley region of California. Laotian gangs are involved in transporting opium to San Francisco, and to other Laotian communities located in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Hispanic gangs have been smuggling brown powdered heroin from Mexico into the San Francisco area for distribution and personal use. The drug is smuggled across the border in vehicles or buses to major cities for transshipment to destinations in Northern California and other western states.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs remain the key wholesale distributors of heroin in Northern California, according to federal, state, and local law enforcement reporting. However, Asian criminal groups have attempted to strengthen their position as major wholesale distributors outside California.

Hispanic street gangs control retail heroin distribution throughout Northern California.

African-American street gangs and, to a lesser extent, the Hells Angels outlaw motorcycle gang also distribute heroin at the retail level. In San Francisco, retail heroin sales occur on street corners. Distributors sometimes package the dosage units in balloons and conceal them in their mouths until just before the actual sale. Hand-to-hand sales are common. In Fresno, local authorities report that heroin is sold in houses. Many of

An alleged crime boss from San Francisco's Chinatown who federal authorities say conspired to turn a far-flung network of secret societies into a criminal empire pleaded innocent to racketeering charges on May 30, 2000. Peter Chong, 58, appeared in court after losing a 2-year battle against extradition from Hong Kong. Chong was the leader of the Hong Kong- and San Francisco-based Wo Hop To triad, according to an indictment returned in 1995. Prosecutors say Chong and other triad leaders formed an overarching group known as Tien Ha Wui, or The Whole Earth Association, with the goal of unifying "all Asian organized crime groups in the United States under the leadership of Peter Chong." The Tien Ha Wui was to coordinate distribution of heroin and cocaine, loansharking, gambling, and firearms trafficking, according to the indictment. Thirty-one defendants connected to the case have been convicted and sentenced, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Associated Press, 30 May 2000.

the walk-up buyers are local workers on lunch breaks. The users buy their fix, shoot up in the house, and return to work. Street enforcement operations have forced sellers to relocate indoors. There is little gang involvement with heroin sales in Fresno. Most sales involve independent distributors who purchase the drug from Mexican wholesale groups. In Modesto, heroin is sold in houses, from cars, or on street corners. The distributors package the Mexican black tar heroin that sells for \$20 for 1/5 gram in cellophane or tin foil. Independent operators sell heroin in Modesto, but organized gangs do not. Mexican black tar heroin is the only heroin available in San Jose. Abusers who cannot obtain heroin use clonazepam to “take the edge off” until they can obtain more heroin. In San Mateo County, Hispanic gangs sell heroin on the street. In Sonoma County, dosage-unit buys of black tar heroin are made from stash houses. Users frequent houses where they purchase pre-packaged drugs. The average street-level dealer for

Police arrested 19 people in San Francisco after videotaping many of them purchasing drugs. The Western Addition neighborhood had been plagued by a drug war that had killed at least six people before the September 1999 raids. In addition to the arrests, the raids netted 3 handguns, 2 pounds of black tar heroin, and \$5,000 in cash.

San Francisco Chronicle, 16 September 1999.

black tar heroin and methamphetamine is a Mexican national male.

The California Department of Justice estimates that there are 25,000 Asian street gang members in California, primarily Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian, including some Hmong. Many gangs now include their telephone area code as part of their name, such as the 209 Lao Crips in Stockton, and the 916 Lao Crips in Sacramento. Asian street-level gangs reportedly distribute very little heroin in San Francisco. There are no known Asian prison gangs.

Cocaine

After methamphetamine and heroin, cocaine is the next most serious drug threat in Northern California. Cocaine use, of both powdered and

crack forms, is steady in the region. In San Joaquin County, crack is as serious a problem as methamphetamine.

Abuse

According to CADDs, the number of people seeking treatment for cocaine/crack abuse in the counties of Northern California rose between FY1998 and FY1999, from 11,132 to 12,275. Nearly 60 percent of those admitted were male.

Cocaine use in San Francisco is relatively steady. “Speedballs” (heroin and cocaine sold together for combination use) are widely available and inexpensive. San Francisco County Medical Examiner data for FY1998 showed 101 deaths ascribed to cocaine, used alone or in combination. This was up from 83 in FY1997 but below the peak of 111 in FY1996.

San Francisco DAWN data showed a slight decrease in cocaine ED mentions between late 1995 and early 1997, but reported little change until a steep drop in early 1999. Newmeyer reports that in San Francisco County, 2,865 persons listed cocaine as their primary drug of abuse during FY1998. This number has changed little since FY1995, but is 13 percent below the FY1993 peak.

Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic data indicate that cocaine treatment admissions between FY1993 and FY1998 in the five-county Bay Area increased gradually in number from 6,271 to 7,974. This was, however, only a slight change in the percentage of total admissions—from 23.4 to 23.6.

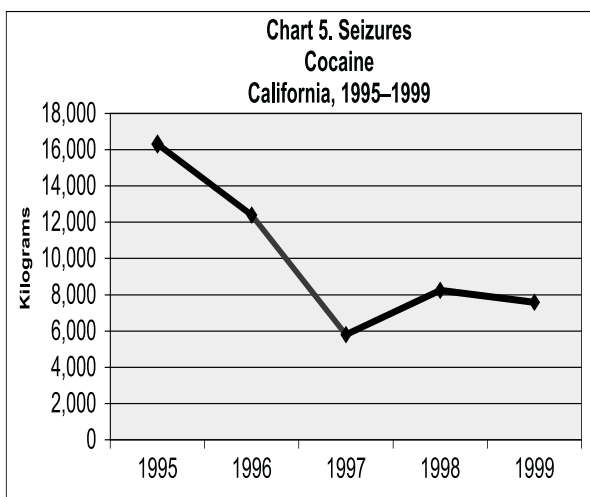
According to 1999 ADAM data, 15 percent of male and 30 percent of female arrestees in Sacramento tested positive for cocaine. The percentages in San Jose were lower, at 13 and 19 percent respectively. In 1998, San Jose and Sacramento reported the two lowest figures—8 and 18 percent respectively—of male adult arrestees testing positive for cocaine of the 35 ADAM sites. The median was 34 percent.

Availability

Cocaine seizures for California declined from a high of over 16,000 kilograms in 1995 to a relatively stable level, ranging between 6,000 and 8,000 kilograms from 1997 to 1999 (see Chart 5).

The DEA District and Resident Offices report that cocaine is abundant and of high purity. The DEA Bakersfield Resident Office, however, reports that cocaine use in its area appears to be limited. Crack cocaine is available in Bakersfield

San Jose is home to a large number of Vietnamese immigrants. In contrast to other groups in California, Vietnamese users never turned to methamphetamine as a drug of abuse, believing that cocaine is purer and its use more prestigious. Methamphetamine has a bad connotation for these users.



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, El Paso Intelligence Center, Operation Pipeline, Seizure Statistics, 1995–1999, updated 23 February 2000.

but is not as popular as it once was. The San Francisco Field Division of DEA reports that supplies of powdered and crack cocaine increased throughout the Bay Area in 1999, with prices ranging from \$14,000 to \$22,000 per kilogram at 60 to 90 percent purity (see Table 3).

Table 3. Cocaine Price and Purity

DEA Offices	Price Range (dollars/kg)		Purity Range (percent)	
San Francisco	14,000	to 22,000	60	to 90
Sacramento	16,000	21,000	40	90
Bakersfield	14,000	16,000	80	95
Fresno	14,000	20,000	80	95
Oakland	15,000	17,000	85	92
San Jose	15,500	18,500	65	89

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration, San Francisco Field Division, *Trends in the Traffic for the 1st Quarter FY2000: October–December 1999*.

Violence

Violence associated with the distribution of crack cocaine poses the primary cocaine-related threat to the Northern California HIDTA counties.¹ Local gangs control the street-level distribution of crack in East Palo Alto, San Francisco, Richmond, Oakland, and Hayward. Although gangs wage turf wars and street dealers are armed, arrests of crack cocaine dealers have reduced the violence associated with street-level sales.

East Palo Alto is a prime example of an area hit hard by the violence associated with crack cocaine. In 1991, East Palo Alto was dubbed the “murder capital of the country” because it had the highest per capita murder rate in the nation. The murders were a direct result of crack cocaine street dealing. After a one-year joint investigation involving local, state, and federal agencies, 100 crack dealers were arrested and sent to prison. The number of homicides decreased from 45 in 1991 to 5 in 1992. Experienced narcotics investigators who interview drug dealers report that California’s “Three Strikes” law is also deterring dealers.

The Jackson Street Boys, a Chinese gang well known to San Francisco authorities, is involved in street-level sales of cocaine. The gang rose to prominence in the mid-1990s and has extended its influence from the Bay Area to Los Angeles and British Columbia. Members of the Jackson Street Boys have been involved in extortion,

home invasion robbery, kidnapping, assaults on police officers, murder, and murder for hire.

One of the most violent African-American street gangs in Northern California, the Project Trojans (PJT), is estimated at 300 members and associates, many of whom will not hesitate to kill. Some members of PJT are involved in a war with the Crescent Park Villains over turf and cocaine. PJT members are commonly armed with high-powered handguns and assault pistols and have been known to wear body armor. They commit violent assaults, shootings, and homicides; victims are often shot more than a dozen times. In August 1999, a PJT member shot and killed a rival gang member at a hip-hop concert in Vallejo.

The Romper Room Gang, an African-American gang in Vallejo, came to prominence in the early 1990s when it committed a series of pizza parlor takeover robberies. The gang branched out to at least 10 other counties and diversified its criminal activities. Authorities linked the gang to narcotics sales, vehicle theft, and drive-by shootings. Romper Room Gang members were identified or arrested for 8 different credit union robberies and suspected in 27 more. The dollar loss from the 35 robberies was \$1.4 million. After a yearlong effort by the Vallejo Violence Suppression Task Force, the Romper Room Gang was dismantled in 1998.

Production

Available law enforcement data indicate that there is no coca cultivated or cocaine produced in

Northern California. However, many retail distributors convert powdered cocaine to crack.

Transportation

Colombian DTOs smuggle cocaine to Mexico by land, sea, and air on a variety of conveyances.

Mexican DTOs receive large, wholesale shipments of cocaine from Colombian DTOs, then

1. Lake, Sonoma, Marin, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Alameda, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Monterey Counties.

transport the drugs to California. They use the interstate system to transport cocaine from the border area to Northern California then throughout the western states, much the same as for heroin and methamphetamine. Los Angeles is the major hub. Sacramento, Stockton, and Modesto are all Central Valley destinations and transshipment points for cocaine transported from the Los Angeles area.

Interstate 5 accounted for almost 90 percent of the 1999 highway seizures in Northern California: 345 of 389 kilograms. Most stops were in the counties surrounding Sacramento. All shipments seized reportedly originated in California. Destinations included California, Oregon, Washington,

and British Columbia. One stop on Interstate 5 in Stanislaus County near Modesto resulted in the seizure of 305 kilograms of cocaine.

Cocaine is also seized from air and railway passengers. Operation Jetway Task Force officers seized 1 kilogram of crack cocaine from a rail passenger traveling from Sacramento to Portland. The crack cocaine was found during a consensual search of the passenger's luggage.

African-American gangs from the Bay Area travel to cities in the Central Valley to purchase powdered cocaine, which they transport back to the Bay Area to distribute. Once there, the gangs convert the cocaine to crack.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs receive the cocaine from the Colombians and move it to stash sites near the border with the United States. Mexican DTOs move the cocaine across the border using commercial and noncommercial means such as tractor-trailers, railcars, private vehicles, and pedestrian traffic. For their services, the Mexican DTOs charge the Colombians up to half the shipment. The Mexican DTOs then use their established distribution infrastructure to supply the cocaine to their wholesale customers.

Mexican and a few Colombian DTOs control wholesale distribution in Northern California. Asian organized crime groups have also become more involved in cocaine trafficking in the San Francisco Bay Area. Vietnamese groups reportedly transport cocaine and other drugs to Oregon from the Bay Area.

Wholesale crack traffickers purchase cocaine in kilogram or multikilogram allotments from traditional cocaine sources, including Colombian and Mexican organizations. They package the cocaine into ounce quantities or convert it into crack and then divide it into ounces for sale at the next level. Wholesalers usually are large groups responsible for most of the interstate transportation of crack and cocaine intended for crack conversion.

Retail distributors convert powdered cocaine into crack, usually in their own kitchens, using a safe and simple method of converting cocaine into cocaine base. Although it produces a product higher in purity than coca paste, the crack conversion process does not eliminate all of the impurities in the cocaine. Adulterants such as lidocaine, procaine, and benzocaine survive the crack conversion process and are inhaled by the user. Federal mandatory minimum sentences are higher for crack than for powdered cocaine, but crack cocaine provides a much higher profit margin for the dealer.

Countless individuals sell crack at the retail level, usually in inner cities. Once arrested, they are replaced almost immediately. Although they are present in virtually every ethnic community and economic group, most crack users live in low-income, urban, African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods.

Street gangs play an important role in cocaine distribution in Northern California. Law enforcement agencies responding to the NDIC National Gang Survey–2000 report that many significant Hispanic and African-American street gangs have ties to and receive wholesale quantities of cocaine from street gangs in Southern California.

African-American gangs and trafficking groups—many of which are affiliated with violent gangs such as the Crips, the Bloods, and the Black Guerrilla Family—are prime distributors of crack in Northern California. African-American gangs distribute roughly 80 percent of the crack within the African-American community and the remainder to drive-up customers on street corners. According to the Sacramento Police Department, the Del Paso Heights Bloods distribute cocaine locally and to other western states.

The California Department of Justice estimates that there could be as many as 100,000 African-American gang members in California, the majority belonging to Crips and Bloods gangs. Each gang has between 10 and 1,000 members from 15 to 38 years old. When in prison, many African-American gang members affiliate with prison gangs such as the Black Guerrilla Family, the Consolidated Crips Organization, the 415 (the area code for San Francisco), or the Bloodline. They usually affiliate with these gangs for protection from other inmates or for control of certain criminal activities in the prison.

In Oakland, the majority of the dosage-unit sales of cocaine are in crack form. About 75 percent of the crack is sold on the street, the remainder from stash houses or other residences. A significant portion of the powdered cocaine is sold to users who combine the cocaine with heroin to form “speed-balls.” In Richmond, dosage units of powdered cocaine and crack are sold on the street and from houses and apartments. In the North Bay area and Santa Rosa, powdered cocaine is the predominant form of the drug. Recent trends indicate that Hispanic distribution groups sell it from stash houses. Dealers work the stash houses in 12- to 24-hour shifts, then change locations to evade law enforcement scrutiny.

In the Sacramento area, African-American gangs such as the Oak Park Bloods and 29th Street Crips convert powdered cocaine into crack and sell it primarily out of houses or cars. The 29th Street Crips produce inexpensive yet high-quality crack. The gang is currently attempting to

become the dominant crack distributor in the Sacramento area. African-American distributors dominate the retail crack trade in Fresno. In some areas, particularly West Fresno, dealers are territorial and will resort to violence to protect their turf. In many low-income areas, however, loosely organized neighborhood groups sell crack in a limited geographic area.

Very little cocaine in either form is sold in San Jose. Occasionally, African-American retail distributors travel to San Jose from elsewhere in the Bay Area or Southern California to sell small amounts of crack or powdered cocaine. In San Mateo County, gangs are usually not involved in street sales of cocaine. Instead, independent African-American entrepreneurs sell crack or heroin on street corners.

In Modesto, African-American gang members sell unpackaged crack hand to hand on street corners. Crack retails for \$20–\$40 for a 1/4 gram rock. Powdered cocaine is sold in tied-off plastic food bags or in bindles.

A Bay Area Vietnamese criminal group traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia, purchased a quantity of “BC Bud” marijuana, smuggled it into the United States, and sold it. The group took the proceeds and attempted to buy 15 kilograms of cocaine, which they were going to sell in British Columbia. According to the smugglers, they could sell the cocaine for \$30,000 per kilogram in Canada. Authorities arrested five men and seized \$250,000 in cash.

Santa Clara County Specialized Enforcement Team,
interview by author, 1 June 2000.

Asian gangs are involved in powdered and crack cocaine distribution in the San Francisco area. The crack is packaged in plastic food bags, while cocaine is sold in envelopes and occasionally glass tubes. Asian groups distribute person to person, often to people they know or who were referred

to them. According to the San Francisco Police Department, the Coung Luong gang distributes cocaine at the street level in that city. Crack is the predominant form of cocaine sold in San Francisco public housing. Both powdered cocaine and crack are sold on the streets of San Francisco.

Marijuana

Cannabis cultivation and marijuana use are widespread in Northern California. Because of the costs associated with surveillance and the eradication of cannabis, some Northern California authorities rank marijuana a more costly threat than cocaine. Medical marijuana initiatives

complicate local law enforcement efforts throughout California. Authorities in some areas consider marijuana a more serious threat than cocaine because of manpower, violence, and financial issues.

Abuse

According to CADDs, the number of people seeking treatment for marijuana/hashish abuse rose from 7,802 in FY1998 to 8,904 in FY1999. In both years about 70 percent of those admitted were male.

The number of DAWN ED marijuana/hashish mentions in San Francisco rose from 305 in 1991 to 507 in 1995 before dropping to 394 in 1998.

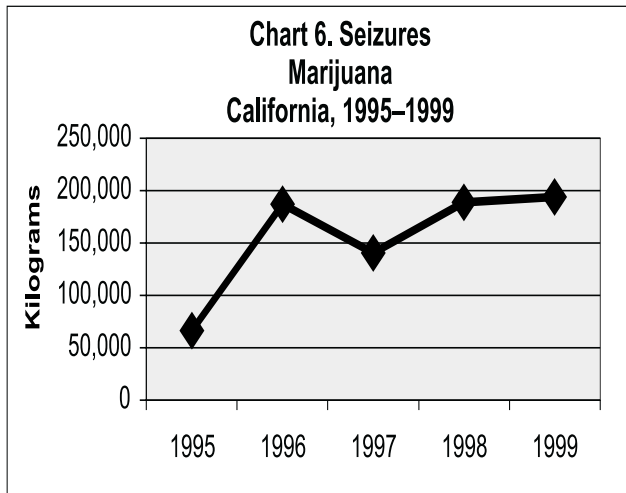
Sacramento ADAM subjects tested higher than San Jose subjects for marijuana use. The percentages in Sacramento were 44 and 33 for males and females respectively, while in San Jose the percentages were 34 and 26.

In contrast, San Francisco ED mentions declined by more than 20 percent from 1995 to 1997, and remained at the new low level in 1998. According to Newmeyer, some 2,135 people were in treatment for primary marijuana problems in the Bay Area in FY1999.

Arrests for marijuana-related offenses in San Francisco County remained stable, between 2,000 and 2,400 per year from 1993 to 1998.

Availability

Marijuana, particularly domestically produced marijuana, remains readily available in Northern California. Marijuana seizures in California were just below 200,000 kilograms in 1999, a high for the 5-year period, according to EPIC data (see Chart 6). Under the DEA’s Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program, authorities in California eradicated 405,440 marijuana plants and seized 2,184 plots and grows in 1998.



Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, El Paso Intelligence Center, Operation Pipeline, Seizure Statistics, 1995–1999, updated 23 February 2000.

Domestically produced marijuana is preferred because of the higher THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content. California-produced marijuana usually contains 10 to 20 percent THC, versus 2 to 5 percent for the Mexican variety. Pound prices for high-grade marijuana produced in Santa Clara County can reach \$4,000–\$6,000. See Table 4 for price and purity information reported by other offices.

In September 1999, authorities in San Benito County made the state’s second-largest marijuana seizure ever. Some 50,000 mature plants growing in a remote area about 4,300 feet above sea level were destroyed by officers from the San Benito County Undersheriff’s Department and the state’s Department of Justice Campaign Against Marijuana Planting. The Under-sheriff said, “In my 30 years here, it’s the most dope I’ve ever seen.”

San Francisco Chronicle, 15 September 1999.

Table 4. Domestic and Mexican Marijuana Prices

DEA Offices	Domestic Marijuana Price Range (dollars/pound)		Mexican Marijuana Price Range (dollars/pound)	
San Francisco	2,500		600	to 1,400
Sacramento	500	to 5,000	800	1,000
Bakersfield	1,500	3,500	100	350
Fresno	1,500	4,500	100	350
San Jose	4,000	6,000	400	900

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration, San Francisco Field Division, *Trends in the Traffic for the 1st Quarter FY2000: October–December 1999*.

Violence

Growers reportedly employ armed guards to protect both indoor and outdoor grows. Growers may warn off intruders with flares and use pits filled with punji stakes, fishhooks dangling at eye level, guard dogs, or trip wires linked to shotguns, grenades, or other explosives. In Fresno County, authorities recently found a grenade with a trip wire strapped to a propane tank. Law enforcement has confiscated semiautomatic weapons, night-vision binoculars, and bulletproof vests from growers.

Law enforcement agencies indicate that in the Emerald Triangle composed of Humboldt, Mendocino, and Trinity Counties near the Oregon border, many cannabis growers protect their plants by violent means. These growers commit murders to expand their influence and use assault weapons while patrolling their plots. Many of these growers are young Caucasians who flaunt their wealth by purchasing expensive vehicles.

Marijuana grows present unique enforcement problems by virtue of their location and the notoriously hostile reception given to law enforcement in rural communities. Growers use elaborate mechanisms to detect law enforcement infiltration and to protect their crops from poachers. Further, any significant law enforcement presence is immediately noted and communicated to those who might be interested. As a result, law

enforcement officers engaged in such investigations are often at risk.

In August 2000, a Madera County sheriff's deputy shot and killed a man at a marijuana farm. Before he was shot, the 19-year-old Mexican had pointed a semiautomatic pistol at the deputy. In the raid, deputies found 7,000 marijuana plants that had grown 5 to 8 feet tall. In October 2000, a 41-year-old man and his 8-year-old son were shot by two men guarding a marijuana grow on the victim's property. The older victim's brother-in-law was arrested about 3 weeks later regarding both the shooting and the marijuana grow.

According to the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, the Sacramaniacs gang (a white supremacist gang) will commit any crime for profit, including distributing marijuana, methamphetamine, and cocaine. The size of a typical white supremacist gang remains between 5 and 20 members who range in age from their early teens to mid-twenties.

The East Bay Regional Park Police warned people to stay away from any marijuana plants they see because "some of these folks will build booby traps, not so much to trap hikers and police but to prevent theft."

Production

The cultivation of cannabis is widespread in Northern California, especially in the Emerald Triangle. The large-scale outdoor cultivation sites that dot the Emerald Triangle often use sophisticated irrigation systems to produce thousands of pounds of high-grade, high-demand marijuana annually. Cannabis cultivators in this area are predominantly young Caucasian males.

Growers increasingly use state and federal lands to cultivate cannabis. In the Bay Area, land

owned by the San Francisco Water Department and the East Bay Regional Park has been used for grows of up to 20,000 plants. When growers use locations like the national forests, the forests themselves suffer from the adverse effects of cannabis cultivation. Cannabis cultivators sometimes set the woods on fire to retaliate against raids by authorities. One blaze burned 12,000 acres. Growers clear-cut cultivation areas with chain saws and spread tons of fertilizer and pesticides.

They set out poison for rodents, which also kills wildlife. California authorities found a marijuana grower's journal documenting the slaughter of hundreds of deer.

In recent months, authorities in Northern California seized large numbers of marijuana plants in large-scale outdoor grows. Officers in Calaveras, Fresno, Madera, and Tulare Counties seized between 4,000 and 14,000 plants in operations in August and September 2000. Madera County officials expect a bumper crop of marijuana in 2000. Eradicating plants at such sites is expensive and time-consuming.

Although most marijuana grown around San Jose is grown indoors, there has been a huge increase in outdoor grows operated by Mexican nationals in the last 2–3 years. Located in remote areas on federal and ranch lands, these grows

have exceeded 50,000 plants. Illegal migrants live at the grow sites tending the plants. Because the sites are so remote, cultivators can spot law enforcement officers coming and have sufficient time to evade capture.

Most marijuana in Fresno is cultivated locally by Mexican nationals using remote areas in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Difficulties in prosecuting marijuana cultivators and users cause law enforcement to concentrate on violations related to other drugs.

Asian growers in Northern California have sometimes cultivated cannabis intermixed with other crops, using legitimate agriculture as a cover for their grows. Discovering the grows is difficult, and uprooting the plants is a time-consuming and labor-intensive task.

Transportation

Mexican groups use the same methods to transport marijuana as methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin. These groups distribute marijuana within California and throughout the United States.

Authorities seized 226 kilograms of marijuana on all highways in Northern California in 1999. Almost all marijuana seized originated in

and was destined for locations in California. Interstate 5, with about 78 percent of the seizures, is the main highway used for transporting marijuana. U.S. Highways 101, 99, and 395 had only a few seizures each. Seizure amounts ranged from 4 to 45 kilograms.

Distribution

Street gangs are responsible for a significant amount of retail marijuana distribution. Law enforcement officials report that many Hispanic and African-American street gangs distribute marijuana in both metropolitan and rural areas of California. The San Francisco Police Department indicates that Hispanic gang members are involved in marijuana distribution.

The California Department of Justice estimates there could be as many as 5,000 Caucasian street gang members in California, many of whom distribute marijuana. Most of the gangs lack structure and

appear to be loose-knit without much leadership. The Sacramento County Sheriff's Office reports that independent individuals without organized gang involvement are the primary distributors of locally grown marijuana.

Asian street gangs are involved in marijuana distribution in San Mateo and Marin Counties. Asian distributors sell marijuana packaged in plastic food bags. Sometimes they sell larger quantities packaged in shoeboxes. They typically sell to people they know or to those known to their personal contacts.

Other Dangerous Drugs

The use of some drugs in the Other Dangerous Drugs (ODD) category is rising—especially LSD and “designer” or “club” drugs such as MDMA (ecstasy) and GHB. The 1990s saw the emergence of high energy, all-night dance clubs known as raves that feature hard pounding techno-music and flashing laser lights. Raves are found in most metropolitan areas throughout the country and can be held either at permanent dance clubs or temporary clubs set up in abandoned warehouses, open fields, or empty buildings for a single weekend event. Among the most popular club drugs is MDMA, which provides users with the energy and heightened sensory perception most seek to enhance their rave experience. Law enforcement authorities in Northern California see a growing threat from these drugs.

Raves are often promoted through flyers and advertisements distributed at clubs, in record shops and clothing stores, on college campuses, and over the Internet. Some rave club owners and promoters sell specialty items to dancers in a way that arguably promotes MDMA use. They provide bottled water and sports drinks to manage hyperthermia and dehydration; pacifiers to prevent involuntary teeth clenching; and menthol nasal inhalers, chemical lights, and neon glow sticks, necklaces, and bracelets to enhance the effects of MDMA.

Drug Enforcement Administration officials believe methamphetamine pills may become more popular among the general population, especially within the rave party scene.

Abuse

California health authorities report an increase in the abuse of MDMA, ketamine (an animal tranquilizer), hydrocodone (a semisynthetic narcotic), diazepam (a sedative), steroids, and clonazepam (an anticonvulsant and a favorite of heroin addicts). California law enforcement officials report an increase in the use of ketamine and MDMA at raves. Ketamine can be injected in its liquid form or ingested orally in tablet or powder form. As a powder, ketamine can be mistaken for cocaine or methamphetamine. MDMA is typically in pill form and is ingested orally. PCP and psilocybin, both hallucinogens, are also abused in

Northern California. There has been an increase in the number of investigations involving LSD.

The San Francisco representative to the National Institute on Drug Abuse Community Epidemiology Work Group (CEWG) reports that GHB and its precursor GBL (gamma butyrolactone) are available in San Francisco. The CEWG also indicates that MDMA continues to be the most commonly used club drug among gay men in the community. In San Francisco, ED mentions of codeine, diazepam, and LSD decreased from 1995 to 1998. PCP mentions, after rising steeply between 1995 and 1996, declined in 1998 to 40 percent of the 1995 mentions.

Availability

Supplies of MDMA and GHB are plentiful at a large number of rave clubs in San Francisco and the Bay Area. MDMA sells for \$20 to \$40 per dosage unit. A recent DEA seizure of MDMA tested 90 percent pure. MDMA and GHB are very popular in

San Jose. Raves are popular and widespread, and cater to high school and college age people.

LSD has regained popularity. Law enforcement reporting indicates that LSD is available in at least retail quantities throughout the region. LSD

is sold under more than 80 street names including acid, blotter, cid, doses, and trips, as well as names that reflect the designs on sheets of blotter paper. Since 1978, the potency of this hallucinogen has generally ranged from 20 to 80 micrograms per dosage unit. This is considerably below the potency encountered during the late 1960s, when users ingested LSD that ranged in concentration from 100 to 300 micrograms or higher, often resulting in harmful reactions known as “bad trips.” Lower potency doses probably account for the relatively few LSD-related emergency room incidents during the past several years. The drug is relatively inexpensive, from \$1 to \$10 per dosage

unit, and is especially attractive to students from junior high school through college.

The pharmaceuticals most commonly diverted to illegal use are hydrocodone and its analogs; Klonopin (clonazepam); Vicodin, a narcotic that sells for \$1 to \$2 a pill on the street; and diazepam. Mexican-manufactured diazepam sells for \$1–\$2 a pill; U.S.-manufactured diazepam is almost nonexistent on the street. Unscrupulous doctors and pharmacy personnel continue to be the main source of diverted pharmaceuticals. No organization or significant group has been identified. The Internet is increasingly used to order controlled substances from pharmacies in Mexico.

Violence

Sexual assaults and violence against women are consequences of date rape drugs such as GHB and Rohypnol. Men typically slip these drugs into women’s drinks to render them unconscious. GHB is a colorless liquid or powder with little odor and a salty taste that is a dangerous central nervous system depressant. Rohypnol decreases blood pressure, impairs motor skills, and causes mental confusion, drowsiness, memory loss, and possibly death. Since the beginning of 2000, four drug-related rapes have been reported in Chico, and officials at the Rape Crisis Intervention Center suspect that more went unreported. In early 2000, four college students in

Chico were raped in one weekend. Two of them had either GHB or Rohypnol in their systems.

The San Francisco Police Department reports a recent interesting trend. Some members of the African-American community have turned to MDMA as a drug of choice. Money derived from street gang sales of MDMA helps fund the production of rap music, which has become a point of contention between two gangs, the Big Block and the Westmob. Four people were killed and six injured in shootings during 2000.

Production

Sources for LSD supplies are located almost exclusively in the Bay Area. Crystalline LSD is mixed with binding substances or diluted to produce ingestible forms—small tablets known as microdots, thin squares of gelatin known as “window panes,” on sugar cubes, and in eye-drop bottles. The most common form is small paper squares soaked in LSD.

LSD producers fall into two categories: major manufacturers that distribute nationwide and

independents that distribute locally. California-based syndicates, which have operated with relative impunity for almost 20 years, control LSD production. They are located in Northern California and the Pacific Northwest. There are some indications that LSD producers based in Oregon are supplying the drug in Northern California.

A small number of independent LSD laboratories operate in the Bay Area. Some are large, sophisticated laboratories producing bulk quantities

of LSD a few times a year. Others are laboratories making small amounts on a regular basis. Authorities have seized very few LSD laboratories in the United States in recent years because of the variation in production cycles and the close-knit, fraternal associations the small number of producers have formed over the past two decades. In 1998, for example, DEA seized only one clandestine LSD laboratory. The wide availability of LSD found in a variety of blotter paper, microdots, and gelatin

tablets is indicative of the existence of several different LSD producers.

DEA estimates that producers in the Netherlands or Belgium make a substantial proportion of the world supply of MDMA. Unique shapes or logos such as a shamrock or a Nike Swoosh on the tablets or pills assist users in identifying various brands of MDMA.

A variety of Internet sites either sell GHB or provide recipes for home production.

Transportation

Most of the MDMA seized in 1999 originated in the Netherlands. The U.S. Embassy in the Netherlands reported a 925 percent increase in MDMA seizures (in kilograms) from 1998 to 1999, and that California was the destination for about 11 percent of MDMA seized. Most of the drugs were seized from luggage on commercial flights. Express mail services are now also commonly used to transport MDMA.

In May 2000, U.S. Customs seized 300 pounds of MDMA tablets at the San Francisco airport mail facility. This shipment, consisting of 490,000 tablets, arrived in air cargo from Paris and was destined for Los Angeles. Customs reported two recent seizures of MDMA tablets at the Oakland mail facility. The shipments from Germany, consisting of 10,000 and 8,500 tablets respectively, were destined for the Central Valley of California. Law enforcement sources report that Los Angeles distributors also supply MDMA to San Francisco.

Organizations using San Francisco as a West Coast transit point smuggle thousands of MDMA

tablets per month from Europe to the United States. Russian and Israeli criminal groups are involved in transporting this drug. Vietnamese individuals also reportedly transport MDMA.

Increasing amounts of date rape and club drugs are being transported into California. Most Rohypnol in Northern California comes from Mexico. U.S. Customs recently reported two seizures of ketamine at the San Ysidro port of entry. One seizure involved 564 ten-milliliter vials; the second consisted of 8,200 ten-milliliter vials. California authorities noted a significant increase in GHB seizures, including three GHB laboratories in 1999. These seizures included numerous GHB-laden parcels that were destined for other parts of the country.

Wholesale quantities of LSD normally are concealed in greeting cards or magazines and sent via the mail or parcel delivery services using fictitious return addresses. Occasionally, wholesale distributors travel to California to meet their sources of supply and often make payments through legitimate money wiring services.

Distribution

In San Francisco, drugs such as LSD, MDMA, and GHB are popular at rave parties, rock concerts, and the like. At these crowded and at times chaotic venues, the drugs are sold openly hand to hand. For

future orders, the source of supply and the purchaser exchange phone numbers and meetings are set up at secure locations. Drugs are also distributed through the mail or through private package delivery firms.

Traditionally, much of the retail LSD distribution in the United States took place during concerts and tours of certain rock music bands. Over the past few years, however, raves have become popular venues for retail LSD distribution. Contacts made at raves are used to secure a steady supply of larger quantities of LSD. Although the gatherings may change, the pattern of LSD distribution does not: young adults sell LSD in quantities of up to 100 dosage units to people they know or with whom they share common interests.

The typical distribution structure is as follows: retail- or user-level sales range from 1 to 10 dosage units, low-level distributors sell 50 to 100 dosage-unit quantities, and midlevel distributors sell 1,000 dosage units and more. Midlevel distributors who normally convert LSD from a powder or liquid to blotter form often have more than one source of supply and sell to several lower-level dealers.

Trafficking networks directing the domestic distribution of LSD are based in and around the Bay Area (including the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco), Berkeley, and Santa Cruz. The majority of MDMA traffickers are U.S. citizens. About one-fifth of identified MDMA traffickers are Israeli.

Outlook

Northern California's remote, forested land affords opportunities for the clandestine production of methamphetamine and the cultivation of cannabis. California's excellent interstate highways facilitate the shipment of drugs within California and throughout the country. Mexican groups, the primary traffickers of drugs in Northern California, transport drugs from California to all parts of the United States. In all likelihood this will continue.

Methamphetamine likely will remain the most serious illicit drug threat in Northern California. Despite tighter state and federal regulations and reporting requirements for methamphetamine precursor chemicals, producers are able to procure enough to saturate the area with inexpensive methamphetamine. State and federal agencies can expect adverse social and medical effects from metham-

A proliferation of mail-order sales has created a marketplace for LSD where the sellers are unknown to the buyers, giving the highest-level traffickers considerable insulation from drug law enforcement operations. The majority of users are middle-class high school and college students who are attracted by low prices and mistakenly believe that the drug is harmless. In 1999, a group based in Berkeley distributed LSD, MDMA, cocaine, and psilocybin mushrooms locally, as well as to Phoenix, Denver, Chicago, New York, and Massachusetts for a variety of college and rave drug traffickers.

San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force officers see increased designer drug use among teenagers. MDMA and GHB use among youth aged 12–18, particularly in high schools, is increasing. The drugs are sold openly at raves, high schools, and fast-food restaurant parking lots. Designer drugs rival marijuana as drugs of choice for high school-age children.

The Sacramento County Sheriff's Office indicates that GHB is becoming a problem. It is made locally and sold by individuals rather than by organizations.

phetamine abuse to continue. State agencies expect that the cost of environmental cleanup will continue to rise, especially in the Central Valley.

Heroin represents the next most serious threat; heroin treatment admissions are higher than for any other drug. The demand for high-purity, low-cost heroin will continue to fuel the flow from Mexico to Northern California and from there to other parts of the country. Opium use will remain largely confined to the Laotian community.

Cocaine and crack are recapturing some of the market share lost to methamphetamine over the past decade. The purity of cocaine has remained consistently higher than that of methamphetamine. Crack-related violence continues to be a concern.

Large-scale marijuana grows on public lands will continue to strain law enforcement resources. Growers tending these sites will continue to use violence to protect their plants.

The popularity of drugs such as LSD, MDMA, and GHB will continue to grow. Abuse, particularly among urban youth, will lead to increased treatment admissions, long-term health concerns, and further strains on social welfare and law enforcement agencies.

Authorities in Central California report that ethnic groups that would not necessarily associate in the past have now joined forces to produce and distribute illicit narcotics. In some cases, these new, loose coalitions have recruited violent gang members to be their enforcement arm. If these new associations solidify, law enforcement efforts to target a particular group will become more complicated.

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