

EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA DRUG AND GANG THREAT ASSESSMENT 2011



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

March 2011



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

Eastern Pennsylvania Drug and Gang Threat Assessment 2011

Product No. 2011-Q0317-005

Executive Summary

The influence of New York area (New York City and northern New Jersey) drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and gangs reaches nearly every sizable drug market in eastern Pennsylvania.^a Dominican DTOs and gangs are the most active of these groups, and their influence within the region is increasing except in select drug markets where Mexican DTOs are dominant and growing. In Philadelphia and Reading, for instance, the influence of Dominican DTOs has diminished since 2008, when Mexican DTOs emerged as the principal wholesale drug distributors, supplying hundreds of kilograms of cocaine and heroin each year to eastern Pennsylvania drug markets. Drug-related violence, committed primarily by criminal groups against other criminals, is increasing in several eastern Pennsylvania communities even as overall violent crime rates are decreasing throughout the region.

Emerging trends in the region include the following:

- New York area gangs—previously significant but ad hoc suppliers of drugs to eastern Pennsylvania—are becoming increasingly organized, entrenched, and dominant in many eastern Pennsylvania drug markets.
- Cocaine and heroin trafficking have represented the greatest drug-related law enforcement and healthcare challenges to communities in eastern Pennsylvania for many years. However, heroin trafficking has increased sharply in recent years,

emerging as the single greatest drug threat to the region.

- Heroin abuse among adolescents is increasing in eastern Pennsylvania, in part because some adolescent prescription opioid abusers are transitioning to heroin.
- Dominican DTOs and gangs—the most prolific drug distributors in eastern Pennsylvania—are strengthening their operations in Hazleton, a strategic location where they are dominating and expanding drug distribution.
- Mexican DTOs are the dominant wholesale cocaine distributors in Philadelphia and Reading drug markets. They are increasingly transporting wholesale shipments of cocaine from the Southwest Border to Philadelphia and Reading, contributing to strong and stable cocaine availability in those drug markets.
- Rival gangs and organized thieves are more frequently engaging in home invasions, ransom kidnappings, and organized thefts from drug dealers in many eastern Pennsylvania drug markets.
- Coatesville, Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Lebanon have experienced an increase in organized and deliberate drug-related violence perpetrated by street gangs and independent robbery crews that target other criminals, particularly drug dealers in possession of cash.

a. For the purposes of this assessment, eastern Pennsylvania is defined as the counties that make up the U.S. Attorneys Office Eastern and Middle Districts of Pennsylvania.

The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) assesses with high confidence^b that the influence of Mexican DTOs will increase in eastern Pennsylvania drug markets, spurred by the ability of these groups to supply the markets with cocaine shipments directly from the Southwest Border area and supported by growing Mexican populations in the region, which they use as cover to mask their operations. Furthermore, NDIC assesses with moderate confidence that incidents of drug-related violence against law enforcement officers will increase, as evidenced by rising levels of aggression by some gang members. NDIC assesses with high confidence that heroin use will increase in the near term as high availability and low prices encourage an increasing prescription opioid abuser population to transition to heroin. Finally, NDIC assesses with high confidence that members affiliated with New York area gangs will move farther into Pennsylvania drug markets—including those in central and western Pennsylvania—where drug prices are higher and where smaller communities often lack the law enforcement strength to deter highly organized drug distribution groups.

Key Issues

New York area gangs—previously significant but ad hoc suppliers of drugs to eastern Pennsylvania—are becoming increasingly organized, entrenched, and dominant in many eastern Pennsylvania drug markets.¹

There are at least 20 nationally recognized gangs, some with multiple subgroups (or sets), active in at least 21 of the 42 counties in eastern

Pennsylvania.² Every gang and gang set is active to some degree in drug distribution, and several were originally based in the New York area.³ These gangs are now among the leading drug distributors in the region.⁴

In many eastern Pennsylvania communities, the nature of drug distribution by gangs that originated in the New York area has shifted from occasional and transient operations to those that are more permanent and established.⁵ New York area gang members have been motivated to establish stronger drug distribution operations in eastern Pennsylvania because there is less organized competition from local independent dealers for distribution areas and because the profit margins for drugs are much higher (see text box on page 3). For example, the retail price for powder cocaine in Scranton (PA) (\$60 per gram) is much higher than in New York City (\$38 per gram).⁶ In addition, former New York area gang members who have migrated into eastern Pennsylvania most likely perceive less law enforcement pressure in the smaller drug markets, where there is less federal law enforcement presence and where local police departments are often much smaller.⁷ For instance, in Scranton, where drug distribution by former New York area gang members has increased since 2008, the Scranton Police Department's Special Investigation Unit is composed of only five members, who investigate crimes such as prescription drug diversion, prostitution, and simple drug possession, as well as organized drug distribution groups.^c

b. "High confidence" generally indicates that the judgments are based on high-quality information or that the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment. "Medium confidence" generally means that the information is credibly sourced and plausible but can be interpreted in various ways, or is not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. "Low confidence" generally means that the information's credibility or plausibility is questionable, the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make a solid analytic inference, or there are significant concerns or problems with the sources.

c. In investigating drug-related crimes, the Scranton Police Department's Special Investigation Unit works closely with the Pennsylvania State Police, the Lackawanna County Drug Task Force, the Pennsylvania State and Lackawanna County Parole offices, the Lackawanna County Sheriff's Office, and the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office. The Special Investigations Unit also works closely with the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Marshal Service, and other local police agencies.

Gang Migration

The leading cause of gang migration into eastern Pennsylvania is the opportunity for members to profit from drug sales in open, uncontested markets.⁸ Other factors that contribute to this migration include relationships between male gang members and local females, legitimate employment opportunities, the desire to be closer to incarcerated family members, avoidance of three-strikes laws in other states, and attempts by gang members to evade law enforcement pressure by moving to rural areas with reduced law enforcement presence.⁹

Gang members often facilitate their transition from the New York City area to smaller drug markets in eastern Pennsylvania by forming relationships with local females.¹⁰ These relationships aid the formerly transient gang members in establishing residency, building a network of contacts with local drug users and distributors, and setting up drug and money stash houses for their operations.¹¹ The gang members then use this infrastructure to recruit local teens and young adults to join the gang and distribute drugs while simultaneously maintaining their gang allegiances and drug connections with associates in the New York City area.¹²

The presence of gangs that are closely affiliated with New York area gangs has expanded in eastern Pennsylvania. These gangs now control drug distribution in several areas, including in many small communities, such as Hazleton and the Poconos region of Monroe County (see [Figure 1 on page 4](#)).¹³ The most dominant gangs overall in smaller drug markets in eastern Pennsylvania are Bloods sets that have gang and drug connections to Bloods in New York City, and Trinitarios, which is associated with Dominican crime networks in New York City and other east coast cities.¹⁴ Additionally, various local gangs with no national affiliation are significant drug distributors in some smaller markets; however, they have been supplanted to

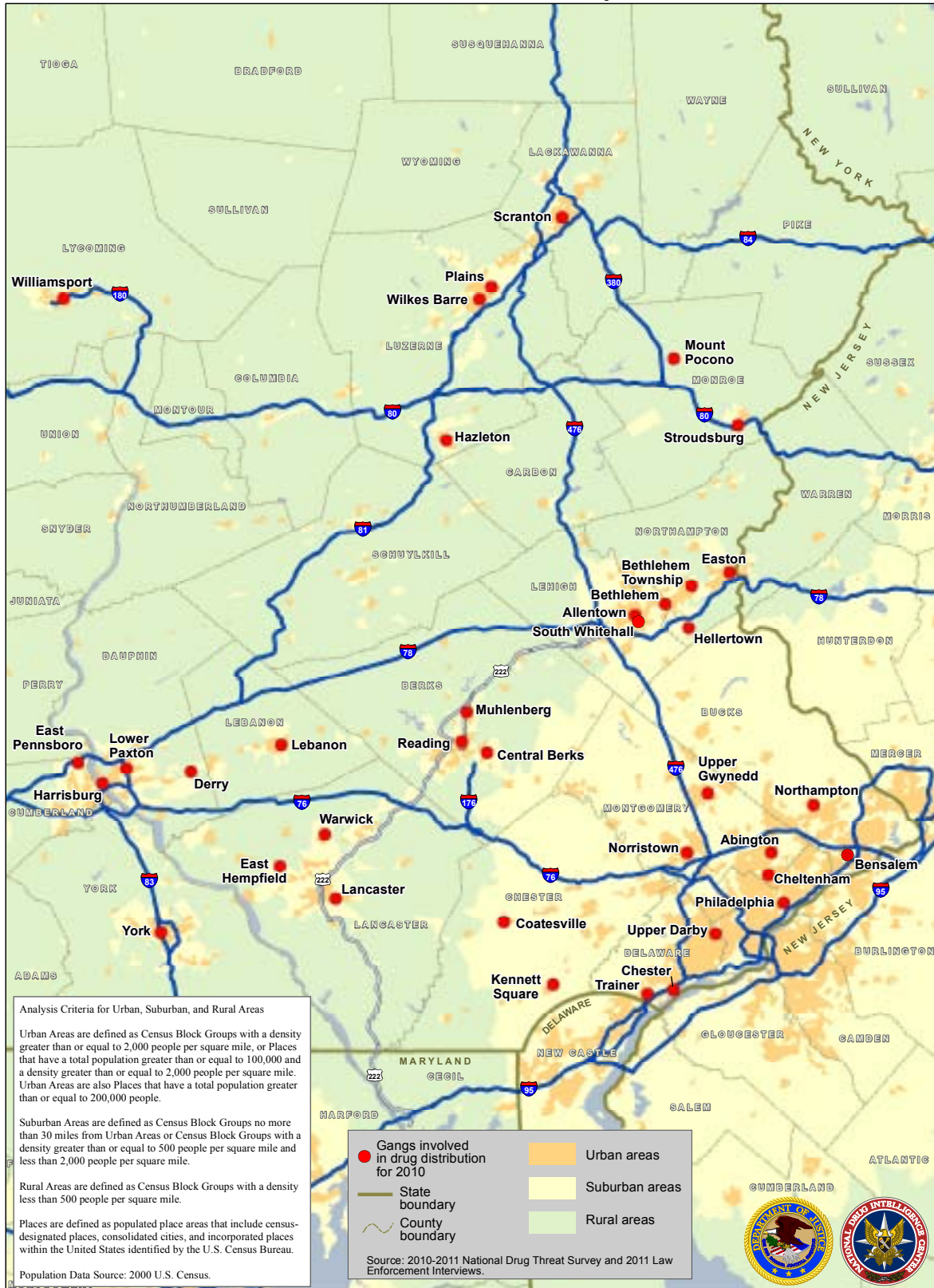
varying degrees by the New York area gangs, which are gaining strength in these drug markets.¹⁵ Gangs and groups (including outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs); [see text box below](#)) most affected are those closest to the New York area that do not have a reliable source of supply.¹⁶

In establishing permanent operations, gang members are increasingly applying organizational structure, rules, and methods of criminal operation that mirror those of large city gangs.¹⁷ Gangs that are operating in the smaller drug markets of eastern Pennsylvania and that are connected to gangs in the New York area or to gangs in Chicago are much more organized than most local gangs.¹⁸ Some gangs now hold regular organization meetings and have established bylaws.¹⁹ Additionally, the local leadership of some gangs are recognizing the authority of affiliated gang leaders in New York City.²⁰ Because they respect their hierarchy, New York City gang leaders communicate orders and recommendations to the leadership of the local gangs.²¹ Furthermore, gangs in smaller markets in eastern Pennsylvania are emulating the practices of gangs in New York City and

Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Presence and Criminal Activity in Eastern Pennsylvania

OMGs are present in many eastern Pennsylvania drug markets; however, their membership totals are much lower than those of the street gangs in the region.²² Drug trafficking is the primary criminal activity of OMGs in eastern Pennsylvania, particularly the distribution of cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana.²³ The principal OMGs active in eastern Pennsylvania are the Outlaws and Pagan's Motorcycle Clubs.²⁴ In addition, law enforcement officers report that the Black Pistons, Hells Angels, Mongols, Vagos, Warlocks, and Wheels of Soul Motorcycle Clubs are active in eastern Pennsylvania to varying degrees.²⁵

Figure 1. Gangs Involved in Drug Distribution in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Areas in Eastern Pennsylvania



Other Drugs Distributed and Abused in Eastern Pennsylvania Drug Markets

Cocaine and heroin trafficking present the greatest challenges to law enforcement; however, several other drugs, including controlled prescription drugs (CPDs), marijuana, methamphetamine, and MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy), are distributed and abused in eastern Pennsylvania as well.²⁶ The trafficking and abuse of these drugs present several challenges to law enforcement and public health officials.²⁷ Availability and abuse of CPDs is very high in most of eastern Pennsylvania, according to law enforcement officers and treatment providers.²⁸ Some drug markets, particularly those in Allentown, Lancaster, Philadelphia, Reading, and York, report that CPDs present an increasing threat to their areas.²⁹ For example, in Philadelphia, treatment admissions to publicly funded treatment facilities for CPD abuse increased sharply from 2007 (10) to 2008 (80), and then to 2009 (387).³⁰ During the first half of 2010, 410 CPD-related treatment admissions were reported.³¹ Law enforcement agencies believe marijuana distribution to be so pervasive in eastern Pennsylvania that 43 of the 49 respondents to the National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) in 2011 reported high availability of the drug in their areas.³² Contributing to this situation has been the increased distribution of high-potency marijuana—often by Asian DTOs—produced at local grow sites as well as at grow sites in California and Canada.³³ Methamphetamine, produced by local dealers and Mexican traffickers outside the region, is present to varying degrees throughout the area; however, most of the methamphetamine abuser population resides in rural areas of central and northern Pennsylvania.³⁴ MDMA availability and abuse in eastern Pennsylvania have decreased since the early 2000s; nevertheless, MDMA distribution still occurs in some eastern Pennsylvania drug markets.³⁵

other large drug markets to reduce local law enforcement detection, such as avoiding public displays of gang clothing, colors, beads, and other known gang identifiers.³⁶

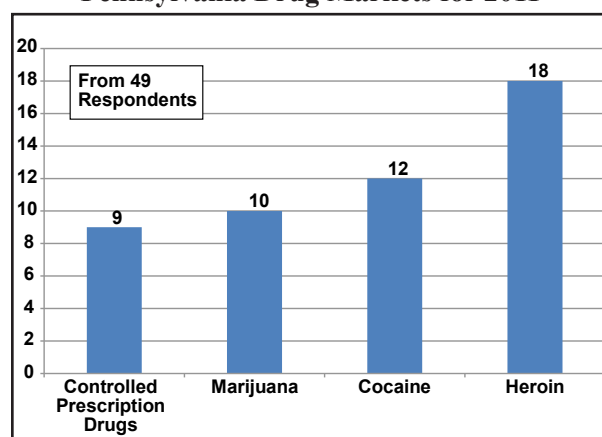
Cocaine and heroin trafficking have represented the greatest drug-related law enforcement and healthcare challenges to communities in eastern Pennsylvania for many years. However, heroin trafficking has increased sharply in recent years, emerging as the single greatest drug threat to the region.³⁷

Notwithstanding the challenges and negative effects of other drugs (see text box), cocaine and heroin trafficking have been especially damaging to eastern Pennsylvania communities for many years.³⁸ Both cocaine and heroin are consistently identified by law enforcement agencies as the greatest drug threats in eastern Pennsylvania (see Figure 2 on page 6) because they present the greatest negative social consequences and consume significant law enforcement resources.³⁹ For example, cocaine or heroin distribution was indicated in 25 of the 34 Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF)^d investigations initiated in the U.S. Attorneys Office Eastern and Middle Districts of Pennsylvania in 2010.⁴⁰ The high percentage of cocaine and heroin investigations naturally results in numerous arrests for cocaine and heroin trafficking. In fact, arrests for cocaine and heroin offenses accounted for more than 70 percent of all Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) drug arrests in Pennsylvania in 2010.⁴¹ The negative impact of cocaine and heroin trafficking are also reflected in NDIC National Drug Threat

d. OCDETF is designed to identify, investigate, prosecute, and dismantle DTOs that have the greatest adverse impact on communities. OCDETF investigations involve federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and interagency task forces and target organizations responsible not only for the distribution of large quantities of narcotics, but also for the violence that is often associated with drug trafficking activity.

Survey (NDTS)^e data for 2011 showing that 30 of 49 Pennsylvania law enforcement agencies identified either cocaine or heroin as the drug that most contributes to violent crime in their areas.

Figure 2. Greatest Drug Threat to Eastern Pennsylvania Drug Markets for 2011



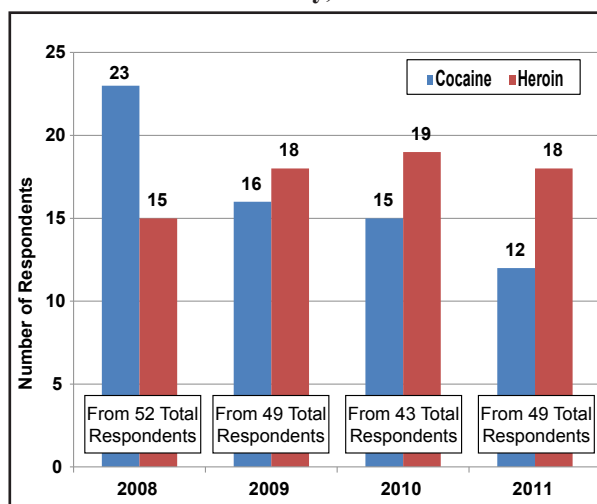
Note: This chart represents the number of responses from eastern Pennsylvania law enforcement agencies to the 2011 NDTS conducted by NDIC. For the purposes of this reference, eastern Pennsylvania is defined as the counties within the Eastern and Middle Districts of Pennsylvania.

The level of concern among law enforcement officials with respect to heroin trafficking and abuse in eastern Pennsylvania has increased significantly since 2008, and heroin is now the leading drug threat in the area, exceeding cocaine.⁴² In fact, since 2009, a greater number of state and local law enforcement agencies in eastern Pennsylvania have identified heroin as their greatest drug threat than have identified cocaine (see Figure 3). Law enforcement officers in many eastern Pennsylvania drug markets report a sharp increase in heroin availability and abuse in

e. The NDTS is conducted annually by NDIC to solicit information from a representative sample of state and local law enforcement agencies. NDIC uses this information to produce national, regional, and state estimates of various aspects of drug trafficking activities. NDTS data reflect agencies' perceptions based on their analysis of criminal activities that occurred within their jurisdictions during the past year. NDTS 2011 data cited in this report are raw, unweighted responses from federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies solicited through either NDIC or the Office of National Drug Control Policy High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area program as of March 4, 2011.

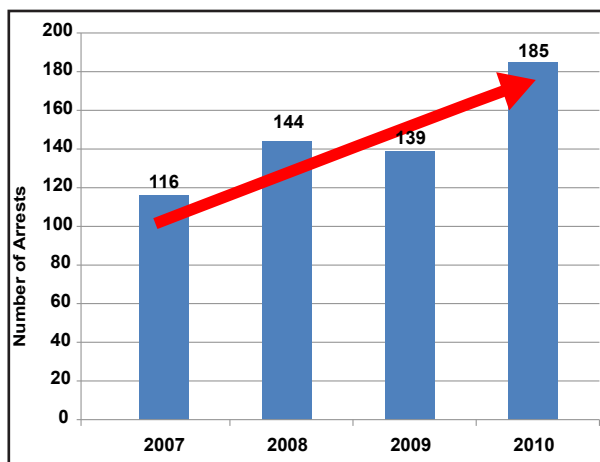
their areas.⁴³ For example, in Ridley Park (a middle-class Philadelphia suburb), heroin distribution is widespread, and according to law enforcement officials and drug treatment providers, availability and abuse have increased significantly.⁴⁴ Supporting the perceptions of increasing heroin trafficking expressed by law enforcement officials are DEA data that show a sharp increase in heroin arrests and seizures in Pennsylvania since 2007 (see Figure 4 and Figure 5 on page 7).⁴⁵ In addition, according to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reporting, there have been a large and increasing number of violent robberies and burglaries at Philadelphia area pharmacies resulting in the theft of prescription opioids valued at several million dollars. The FBI further reports that these thefts have been increasing because of the high demand for the drugs and the tremendous profit the thieves can achieve by selling the stolen pills. The high level of heroin distribution is also reflected in 2011 NDTS data showing that 39 of the 49 survey respondents in eastern Pennsylvania reported either high or moderate heroin availability in their areas.⁴⁶

Figure 3. Greatest Drug Threat, Eastern Pennsylvania, by Number of Agencies Responding to the National Drug Threat Survey, 2008–2011



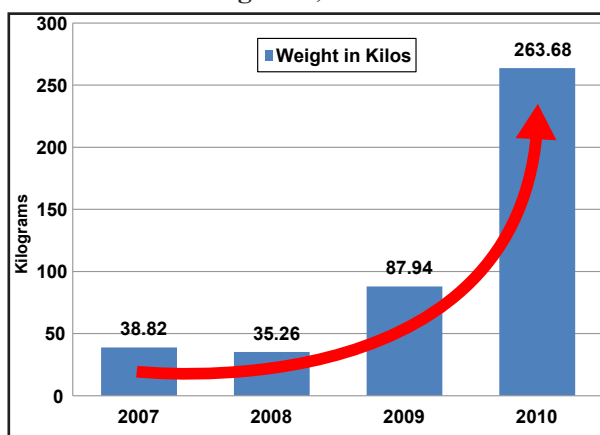
Source: National Drug Threat Survey.

Figure 4. DEA Heroin Arrests in Pennsylvania, 2007–2010



Source: Drug Enforcement Administration.

Figure 5. Heroin Seized in Pennsylvania, in Kilograms, 2007–2010



Source: National Seizure System.

Note: This chart represents the heroin seizure totals for Pennsylvania for the years queried as they were reported to the National Seizure System (NSS), which is maintained by the DEA El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC).⁴⁷

Heroin and OxyContin Prices

In Philadelphia, the price per dose for heroin could be \$10 or lower.⁴⁸ OxyContin, by comparison, is much more expensive. The median price for illegally diverted OxyContin in Philadelphia in 2010 was \$39 for a single-dose 80-milligram pill.⁴⁹

Increased heroin trafficking and availability have resulted in rising instances of heroin abuse, addiction, and treatment.⁵⁰ Complete and current data regarding drug treatment for eastern Pennsylvania are not available. However, treatment providers throughout the region report with certainty, based on their observation and experience, that heroin abuse has increased in eastern Pennsylvania.⁵¹ According to one treatment facility official in Philadelphia, the facility's adult methadone treatment program for opioid addiction is now its largest program. Similarly, an adolescent treatment facility official reported that treatment for opioid addiction is the most common type of drug treatment in that facility.

A growing number of suburban youths are initiating heroin use, pushing rates of heroin abuse higher, according to treatment experts and law enforcement officials.⁵² The increase in heroin abuse among suburban adolescents and young adults (particularly those at or near age 17) is due in part to addiction to prescription opioids—which are sometimes prescribed initially for legitimate conditions. In many instances, adolescents' initial abuse of prescription opioids develops into dependence and, later, heroin addiction because of the low cost of heroin relative to prescription opioids (see text box).⁵³ Additionally, in some communities, heroin abuse is viewed as a status symbol among adolescents, leading to heroin use among even very young children.⁵⁴ For example, a 14-year-old girl from the Poconos region of Monroe County was treated in April of 2010 for a heroin overdose.⁵⁵ According to drug treatment providers, such incidents, previously considered very unusual, have become more common in some eastern Pennsylvania communities as a growing number of early adolescent drug users try heroin.⁵⁶ Some treatment facilities are now regularly admitting heroin users as young as age 14.

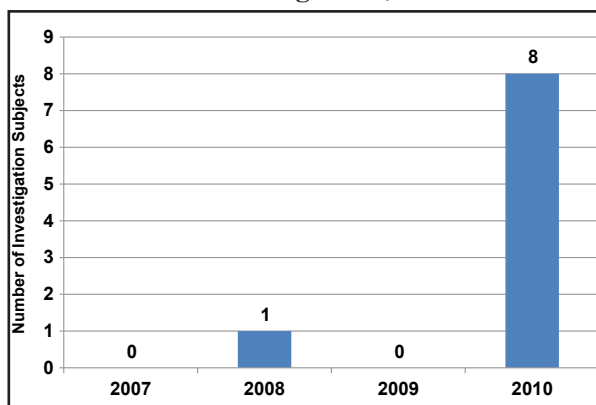
Dominican DTOs and gangs—the most prolific drug distributors in eastern Pennsylvania—are strengthening their operations in Hazleton, a strategic location where they are dominating and expanding drug distribution.⁵⁷

Dominican DTOs and gangs are operating in more eastern Pennsylvania communities than any other group.⁵⁸ They control most wholesale cocaine and heroin distribution in at least two eastern Pennsylvania drug markets: Allentown and Hazleton. In nearly every other drug market in the region, Dominican DTOs and gangs play a critical (if not outright dominant) role in maintaining stable drug supplies for other gangs and independent dealers in large (Philadelphia), midsized (Lancaster), and even small (the Poconos region of Monroe County) markets.⁵⁹ Dominican DTOs operating in eastern Pennsylvania are supplied with cocaine and heroin from New York area sources (typically Dominican DTOs or gangs) that usually are supplied by Mexican DTOs.⁶⁰ However, drug dealers in some secondary markets, particularly in southeastern Pennsylvania communities such as Lancaster and York, are supplied by Dominican DTOs based in Philadelphia that typically are supplied by Mexican DTOs.⁶¹ Widespread cocaine and heroin distribution by Dominican traffickers has drawn increasing attention from federal law enforcement agencies—a rising number of Dominican criminal organizations have become the subject of OCDETF investigations. For example, in 2010, Dominicans were subjects in 8 of the 34 OCDETF investigations initiated in the Eastern and Middle Districts of Pennsylvania, a marked increase over previous years (see Figure 6).⁶²

Dominican DTOs and gangs dominate wholesale drug distribution in Hazleton and are working to strengthen their position to include more centralized operations based in Hazleton.⁶³ Dominican DTOs and gangs have dominated cocaine and heroin distribution in Hazleton

since the late 1990s.⁶⁴ However, over the last 2 years, their geographic drug distribution influence, previously confined to Hazleton and the surrounding rural communities, has expanded to include Kingston, a neighboring community to Wilkes-Barre, as well as drug markets in other nearby counties.⁶⁵ While working to expand drug distribution, Dominican criminal groups in Hazleton have established new wholesale sources for cocaine that deliver multikilogram quantities of cocaine directly to Hazleton each month.⁶⁶ These new drug sources of supply enable Dominican traffickers in Hazleton to operate independently of New York City associates and sources and to maintain a consistent level of drug availability for greater expansion to new midlevel and retail customers.⁶⁷

Figure 6. Dominican Persons or Organizations as Subjects of OCDETF Investigations, 2007–2010



Source: Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force.

Note: This chart represents the number of OCDETF case summaries that make mention of Dominican persons or organizations as subjects for each investigation in the Eastern and Middle Districts of Pennsylvania. The totals represent only those OCDETF investigations that were initiated within each year queried.⁶⁸

Dominican DTOs and gangs have centralized more of their eastern Pennsylvania operations in Hazleton, primarily because of its unique geographic location.⁶⁹ Hazleton is near the intersection of Interstates 80 and 81, providing access to major trafficking routes for drug shipments arriving from New York and from the Southwest Border via southeastern states

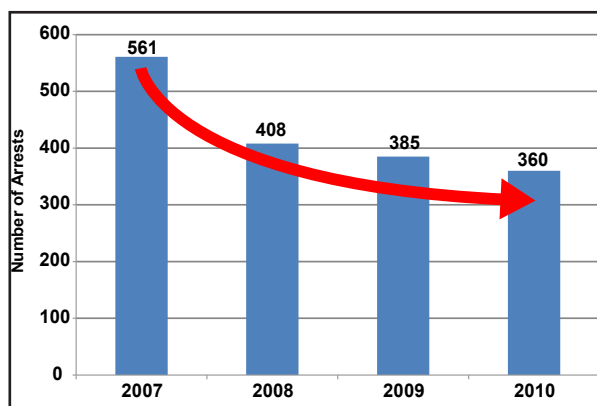
(see Figure 8 on page 10).⁷⁰ Additionally, the presence of a long-established Dominican population, along with interstate highways that directly connect Hazleton to other Dominican populations in New York and New England, makes the city a favorable destination for Dominican fugitives seeking a place to operate away from law enforcement pressure in those other areas.⁷¹ Some law enforcement officials, for example, have reported several incidents in which Dominican criminals fled law enforcement pressure in the New York area and traveled to Hazleton, where they believed they could evade detection. Furthermore, several retail and midlevel drug distributors in Hazleton are former state prisoners who have since been released. A minimum security halfway house in Hazleton regularly receives inmates from Pennsylvania state correctional facilities.⁷² The inmates who are released from the halfway house often remain in Hazleton instead of returning to their hometowns. Several of these individuals have been recruited to join local Bloods sets that are supplied with drugs by Dominican criminal groups.⁷³

Mexican DTOs are the dominant wholesale cocaine and heroin distributors in Philadelphia and Reading drug markets. They are increasingly transporting wholesale shipments of these drugs from the Southwest Border to Philadelphia and Reading, contributing to strong and stable cocaine and heroin availability in those drug markets.⁷⁴

Mexican DTOs are the leading wholesale suppliers of cocaine and heroin to drug distribution groups in Philadelphia and Reading and in surrounding areas, such as Norristown, Montgomery County, and southern Chester County.⁷⁵ Mexican drug traffickers have supplied cocaine, to some extent, in Reading for several years, living within a significant Mexican population in the city. However, Philadelphia has experienced a significant increase in cocaine and heroin supply by

Mexican DTOs, particularly since 2008.⁷⁶ Prior to 2008, cocaine and heroin distributors in Philadelphia were supplied almost entirely by New York area-based Colombian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican DTOs.⁷⁷ While New York area-based DTOs remain a significant source of supply, the influence of those sources has diminished significantly relative to Mexican DTOs. The increased flow of cocaine and heroin directly from the Southwest Border to Philadelphia and Reading by Mexican sources ensures more stable and consistent availability of those drugs.⁷⁸

Figure 7. DEA Pennsylvania Cocaine Arrests, 2007–2010



Source: Drug Enforcement Administration.

Through the strength of direct Mexican DTO cocaine supply, Philadelphia and Reading are now among the most prominent cocaine markets in the eastern United States. Philadelphia was the first cocaine market to report significant cocaine shortages in early 2007, a trend that spread nationally through 2007 and 2008 and persisted in several drug markets through 2010. The cocaine shortages were evidenced by a sharp decrease in cocaine arrests in eastern Pennsylvania since 2007 (see Figure 7). Unlike in many other U.S. drug markets, however, cocaine availability in Philadelphia and Reading has largely recovered.⁷⁹ In fact, Philadelphia (including Reading) was the first large cocaine market to recover after the 2007 cocaine shortages.⁸⁰

Figure 8. Drug Source of Supply to Eastern Pennsylvania Drug Markets

Drug Source of Supply to Eastern Pennsylvania Drug Markets



Source: Federal, state, and local law enforcement reporting.

Drug Transportation by Mexican DTOs Operating in Eastern Pennsylvania

Mexican DTOs usually transport cocaine, heroin, and other drugs to eastern Pennsylvania drug markets using private vehicles equipped with hidden compartments and mechanical traps, commercial vehicles, and package delivery services.⁸¹ Mexican traffickers transporting drugs over roadways travel to eastern Pennsylvania most often on I-95 or I-81 directly from the Southwest Border or through Atlanta (GA) or North Carolina (both major transshipment areas for cocaine and heroin destined for eastern states).⁸² Typically, private vehicle cocaine and heroin shipments are transported in quantities of 10 kilograms or less, and commercial vehicle shipments, while lower in frequency, are generally much larger (usually 75–100 kg).⁸³ Most package delivery service cocaine and heroin shipments by Mexican DTOs destined for the eastern Pennsylvania area originate from Arizona, California, or Texas, in quantities of 5 kilograms or less.⁸⁴

Prices for cocaine in each market remain higher than in 2006, but cocaine availability has held at levels adequate to satisfy the demand in these markets.⁸⁵

By 2011, Mexican DTOs were supplying hundreds of kilograms of cocaine each year directly from the Southwest Border (or through southeastern states) to Dominican and Puerto Rican DTOs, various street gangs, and independent dealers in Philadelphia and Reading.⁸⁶ This direct source of supply from Mexican DTOs along with stabilized cocaine availability has resulted in cocaine pricing that equals or is lower than prices in New York City. For example, the median wholesale price for cocaine in Reading (\$32,000 per kg) is similar to the price in New York City (\$31,500 per kg).⁸⁷ Overall, Mexican DTO presence in Philadelphia and Reading has inhibited the movement of New York area-based gangs into these markets

because the gangs cannot turn high profits on drugs supplied from New York as they do in many other drug markets in the region. Conversely, the competitive price, relative to New York prices, is helping Philadelphia- and Reading-based distributors serve as the source of supply for cocaine to surrounding smaller markets.

Some of the criminal gang activity occurring in eastern Pennsylvania is not drug-related but nevertheless is very profitable and often difficult for law enforcement to detect and disrupt.

Gang members frequently carry, and sometimes use, illegal firearms in conducting their criminal activities. The most common weapons discovered by law enforcement officers are semiautomatic handguns, revolvers, and sawed-off shotguns and rifles.⁸⁸ Gang members in eastern Pennsylvania usually obtain their weapons through home invasions, in exchange for drugs, or through straw purchases conducted by their female associates. Gang members also solicit female associates to hold weapons for them, believing that females are less likely to be searched by law enforcement officers.⁸⁹ Despite continued concern regarding the use of guns by gang members, law enforcement officials report that the number of weapons encountered during interactions with gang members has decreased since Pennsylvania enacted stronger weapons laws.

Various criminal activities by gang members in eastern Pennsylvania generate proceeds that they either launder through local businesses or smuggle out of the region in bulk cash shipments. For example, Dominican gangs in Hazelton simply smuggle shipments of bulk cash out of the United States to the Dominican Republic, where it is laundered through businesses in that country.⁹⁰

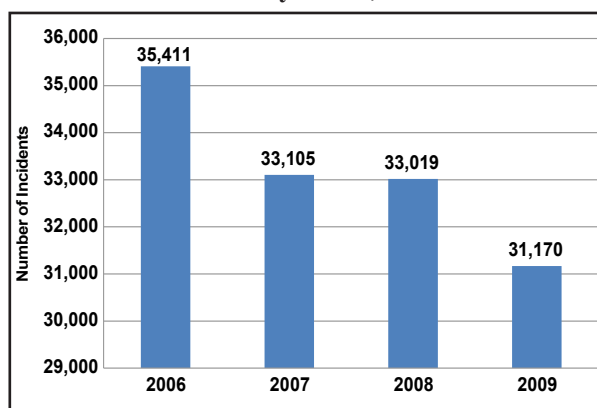
Rival gangs and organized thieves are increasingly engaging in home invasions, ransom kidnappings, and organized thefts from drug dealers in many eastern Pennsylvania drug markets.

Overall, violent crime rates in Pennsylvania are decreasing, but drug-related violent crime between some rival criminal groups in eastern Pennsylvania is increasing. According to Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System data, the total number of violent crime incidents decreased by approximately 12 percent in eastern Pennsylvania from 2006 to 2009 (see Figure 9). However, some areas of eastern Pennsylvania, particularly Coatesville, Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Lebanon, have experienced an increase in organized and deliberate drug-related violence.⁹¹ Such violence is typically conducted by street gangs and independent robbery crews that target other criminals.⁹²

Some gang violence has been directed against law enforcement officers, and in some areas such violence has increased.⁹³ For example, gangs in Allentown have become increasingly bold over the past 2 years in their interactions with law enforcement.⁹⁴ Although complete data are not available, law enforcement officers in Allentown report that the number of incidents in which officers were required to draw their weapon when engaging gang members has increased.⁹⁵ This is primarily due to an increase in gang members carrying firearms and using them in the commission of criminal activity.⁹⁶ Law enforcement officials in Allentown also report a significant increase in the number of incidents of assaults against on-duty police officers by gang members.⁹⁷ Additionally, a number of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies report increased incidents of gang members carrying firearms in Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre, and Williamsport.⁹⁸

Drug-related violence typically is not related to disputes over drug distribution areas. Most is committed by organized theft and robbery rings that exclusively target gang members and drug dealers who they suspect have drugs and cash stashed in their homes. Targeting drug dealers who have illicit bulk cash stashes provides these criminal groups with the opportunity for immediate profit. For example, organized criminal groups extort drug dealers by taxing them for the right to distribute drugs in their area. When dealers refuse to pay the tax, the criminal groups often target those individuals for home invasions, robberies, and ransom kidnapping until the tax debt is recovered.⁹⁹ These violent acts are very profitable and pose little risk of law enforcement detection because drug distributors rarely report crimes involving the theft of drugs or drug proceeds.

Figure 9. Violent Crime in Eastern Pennsylvania, 2006–2009



Source: Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System.
 Note: This chart represents all violent crimes, including murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, reported to the Pennsylvania Uniform Crime Reporting System by law enforcement agencies in the Northeast and Southeast Common Human Service Regions in Pennsylvania for each year queried.

Outlook

NDIC assesses with high confidence that the influence of Mexican DTOs will increase in eastern Pennsylvania drug markets, particularly in areas not already dominated by New York area gangs. Areas where Mexican DTOs most likely will expand their operations include communities where Mexican migrant and permanent populations are rising, such as Harrisburg, Lancaster, and York.

NDIC assesses with moderate confidence that incidents of violence against law enforcement officers will increase. In some eastern Pennsylvania drug markets, criminal groups are increasingly using firearms during their criminal activities. Members of drug distribution gangs have recently become more aggressive toward law enforcement officers.

NDIC assesses with high confidence that heroin use will further increase in the near term as high availability and low prices encourage an increasing prescription opioid abuser population to transition to heroin. This increase will likely lead to greater stress on the healthcare system, since instances of heroin and prescription opioid treatment, overdose, and death increase with higher rates of use.

NDIC assesses with high confidence that gang members affiliated with New York area gangs will move farther into Pennsylvania drug markets, including central and western Pennsylvania, where drug prices are higher and where smaller communities often lack the law enforcement strength to deter highly organized drug distribution groups.

Endnotes

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