December 2000

California

Southern District

Drug Threat Assessment

National Drug Intelligence Center
U.S. Department of Justice

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Preface

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

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California
Southern District
Drug Threat Assessment

Executive Summary

The California–Mexico border continues to be one of the most active drug smuggling corridors in the Southwest. Although only 7 percent of the length of the Southwest Border, the California portion accounted for about 18 percent of the drugs seized there in 1999. Increasing commerce between the United States and Mexico has had an impact at the border as Mexican drug trafficking organizations continue to use the free flow of trade to facilitate their drug smuggling operations.

Mexican drug trafficking organizations remain the major threat to the Southern District, using it as both a destination and a transshipment point for drugs destined for locations throughout the United States. These organizations, working through established smuggling and distribution networks, dominate the trafficking of methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, and marijuana. Mexican wholesalers usually work through middlemen who move the drugs to street-level dealers.

Methamphetamine is considered the number one drug threat. After a period during which methamphetamine abuse appeared to have stabilized, abuse of the drug appears to be increasing once again. Prices are stable but purity levels tend to fluctuate, ranging anywhere from 12 to 93 percent. The volume of methamphetamine produced in Southern California has declined but seizures of laboratories and precursor and essential chemicals continue. Pressure from law enforcement has forced producers to move their operations north into Central and Northern California, east into Arizona, and south into Mexico. Most of the methamphetamine available in the region is produced in Mexico. Mexican polydrug organizations, working through middlemen, are the primary sources of supply at the wholesale level and continue to dominate the methamphetamine market. Independent dealers, organized groups, and street gangs distribute methamphetamine at the retail level.

Heroin seizures increased in 1999 and continued to increase through the first six months of 2000. Heroin use, particularly among younger users, is growing. The heroin of choice in Southern California is Mexican black tar, but Mexican brown powder and South American heroin are available in the region. Prices are relatively stable and purity levels remain high. Mexican drug trafficking organizations continue to control the heroin market in the region and are the primary sources of supply at the wholesale level. Independent dealers, organized groups, and street gangs distribute heroin at the retail level.

Cocaine is readily available, prices are relatively stable, and purity levels are high. Cocaine use increased overall in 1999, but preliminary figures for 2000 indicate that use may be stabilizing. Crack cocaine is more often encountered at the street level in San Diego than powdered cocaine. Cocaine seizures increased in the final quarter of 1999 and continued to increase through the first 6 months of 2000. Most of the cocaine smuggled across the California–Mexico border is transshipped to other locations, usually Los Angeles. Mexican drug trafficking organizations are the primary cocaine suppliers at the wholesale level, and they use middlemen to move the drug to retail dealers.

More marijuana has been seized in Southern California than all other drugs combined. Marijuana also has shown the biggest increase in the number of users, particularly among those 18 and younger. Mexican marijuana predominates in the region but domestically produced marijuana and marijuana from Canada (BC Bud) are also available. Mexican drug trafficking organizations are the primary wholesalers, and they use middlemen to move the marijuana to street-level dealers. Mexican drug trafficking organizations continue to smuggle large amounts of marijuana into and through the district, using it as both a destination and a transshipment point.

Law enforcement is increasingly concerned about the growing use of the club drugs ketamine, GHB, Rohypnol, MDMA (ecstasy), LSD, and PCP, all of which are available at the street level. Laboratory seizures indicate that GHB is being produced in the region. For the most part PCP and LSD are supplied domestically. In some cases Rohypnol, MDMA, and ketamine are being brought into the region from Mexico. Another drug that is a growing concern is clonazepam. Clonazepam is a Rohypnol-type drug that is being used in sexual assaults.

After a period of relative stability, overall drug seizures increased in the last quarter of 1999 and continued to increase during the first quarter of 2000. The amount per seizure has increased slightly even as drug traffickers attempt to minimize their risk by shipping smaller amounts. In some cases, they appear to have applied this practice to the movement of currency as well; however, bulk shipments of cash are still moved across the border into Mexico.

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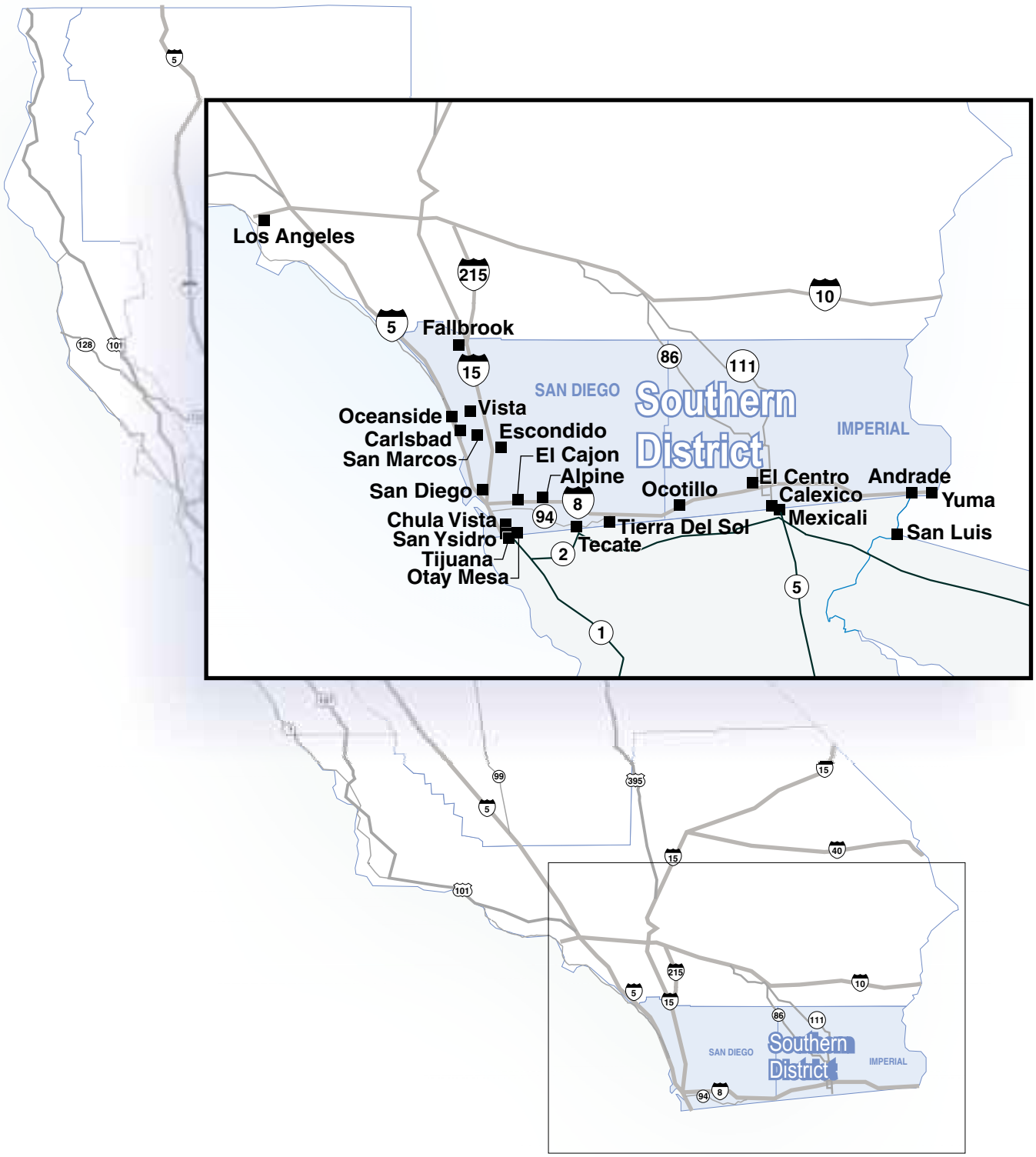


Southern District of California.

Note: This map displays features mentioned in the report.

California Southern District Drug Threat Assessment

Overview

This report covers the Southern U.S. Attorney District of California, which comprises San Diego and Imperial Counties, both of which share a border with Mexico.

The California–Mexico border accounts for approximately 7 percent or 145 miles of the Southwest Border and about 18 percent of the drugs seized there. Southern California has six ports of entry (POEs)—Andrade, two at Calexico, Otay Mesa, San Ysidro, and Tecate—which continue to be among the busiest on the Southwest Border. (See Map on page 3.) Since the North American Free Trade Agreement was implemented in 1994, commercial trade with Mexico has increased 115 percent, significantly affecting the number of border crossings between the United States and Mexico. Table 1 indicates that over 31 million conveyances (trucks, buses, vehicles, trains, aircraft) and more than 18 million pedestrians transited the California–Mexico border in 1999, an increase of about 13 percent since 1995. Truck traffic increased 36 percent, the number of railcars increased 35 percent, estimated bus crossings increased 66 percent, and foot traffic rose 15 percent. U.S. Customs (USCS) further reports that the total number of individuals—pedestrians, drivers, and passengers—crossing the California–Mexico border in 1999 exceeded 95 million.

Fast Facts

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

Population (1999)	2.9 million
Median income (2000)	San Diego County–$41,443 Imperial County–$22,201
***Unemployment rate (2000)**	5.0%
Land area	8,379 sq mi
Shoreline	76 miles
***Capital**	Sacramento
Principal cities	San Diego, Chula Vista, Escondido, El Centro
Number of counties	2
Principal industries	San Diego County–Biotechnology, financial services, seafood, manufacturing, ship building, and telecommunications. Imperial County–Agriculture, manufacturing, telecommunications, trucking, and warehousing.

Table 1. Border Crossings*

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Amount of Change	% of Change
Trucks	**698,692**	**694,697**	**815,568**	**881,157**	**949,651**	**250,959**	**36**
Buses	**91,816**	**110,297**	**128,677**	**138,702**	**152,722**	**60,906**	**66**
Passenger Vehicles	**27,323,722**	**25,193,443**	**27,606,400**	**29,628,019**	**30,330,013**	**3,006,291**	**11**
Railcars	**7,484**	**9,810**	**8,104**	**7,798**	**10,135**	**2,651**	**35**
Aircraft	**0**	**6,986**	**8,831**	**8,509**	**8,567**	**1,581**	**23**
Pedestrians	**15,969,973**	**19,177,856**	**18,942,208**	**18,096,532**	**18,427,324**	**2,457,351**	**15**
TOTAL	**44,091,687**	**45,193,089**	**47,509,788**	**48,755,941**	**49,812,443**	**5,779,739**	**13**

*Totals do not include vessels cleared by airport-seaport inspectors.
Source: United States Customs Service, unofficial statistics.

In addition to the land POEs, two large bays—San Diego Bay and Mission Bay—provide maritime access to the region. Figures from Customs for 1998 and 1999 show a 6 percent increase in the number of commercial vessels and passengers cleared and a 41 percent increase in the number of private aircraft and passengers cleared at the port of San Diego. (See Table 2.) The San Diego Port is also used by an increasing number of private watercraft. San Diego County has about 76 miles of coastline and the area between Tijuana and San Diego is mostly beachfront, open to maritime drug smuggling.

Air transport services— passenger and cargo—are supplied by a number of airports in the area. San Diego, Tijuana, and Mexicali each have an international airport and smaller commercial and private airfields are located on both sides of the California–Mexico border.

San Diego County has two main interstate highways running north and south, I–5 and I–15. (See Map on page 3.) Interstate 5 extends south from San Diego to the San Ysidro POE on the California–Mexico border. It also extends north from San Diego to the U.S.–Canada border at Blaine, Washington, the busiest land POE in the Pacific Northwest. It passes through six major metropolitan areas between San Diego and Blaine including Los Angeles, Sacramento, Portland, and Seattle. Highway 15 extends from San Diego to Alberta Province at the U.S.–Canada border. This route passes through sparsely populated as well as metropolitan areas such as Las Vegas, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Great Falls, Montana.

In Imperial County, Highways 111 and 86 also run north and south originating in the border area at Calexico, California, across the border from Mexicali, Mexico. The four highways intersect with I–8, an east–west route which parallels the

Table 2. Conveyances and Individuals Cleared
Port of San Diego

Type	1998	1999
Commercial Aircraft	**1,793**	**1,621**
Commercial Air Passengers/Crew	**144,126**	**119,145**
Private Aircraft	**86**	**121**
Private Air Passengers	**32**	**552**
Vessels	**2,274**	**2,160**
Vessels Passengers/Crew	**158,609**	**149,060**

Source: United States Customs Service.

Rail Transport

Agreements among U.S., Canadian, and Mexican rail companies have created an intermodal transportation system that stretches from Canada to Panama. This rail system has the capacity to move 4 million freight cars a year, about 364,000 of those across the Southwest Border. Railroads have a larger cargo capacity than any other form of transportation. One boxcar has more than 5,000 cubic feet of cargo space and can accommodate over 200,000 pounds of cargo. In other words, a train containing 50 boxcars can carry 5,000 tons or 10 million pounds of cargo.

Rail transport also has intermodal capabilities. An intermodal transportation system uses more than one mode of transport to move cargo: ship-to-rail, rail-to-truck, rail-to-barge, and ferry-to-rail or truck. Containers are most often used for intermodal transportation, enabling cargo to be moved from one type of carrier to another without being repackaged.

Intermodal transportation is seen by many as an ideal solution to congestion at the border. As trade within the Western Hemisphere continues to increase, shippers likely will rely more and more on intermodal services.

Mexican drug traffickers have used the railroads to smuggle drugs to and through the Southwest Border since the 1980s. A system that links no fewer than eight countries and has intermodal capability and a larger cargo capacity than any other form of transportation will continue to attract smugglers of illicit goods.

Southwest Border connecting San Diego, El Centro, Yuma, Arizona, and points east. Interstate 8 eventually intersects with I–10 in Arizona. Interstate 2 is an east–west route in northern Mexico that parallels the border connecting Calexico, Tecate, and Tijuana, where it intersects with Mexican Highway 1D/1 west and Mexican Highway 15 in Sonora. Highway 1/D1 extends from Tijuana south to La Paz, Baja California Sur, almost the entire length of the Baja Peninsula. Highway 15 runs from Nogales, Mexico, across the border from Nogales, Arizona, south into Sinaloa, Mexico.

Railways also provide access to the region. A freight railway connects San Diego to Tijuana and a Mexican railroad extends north

from Mexico City along the western gulf to the Southwest Border. This railroad interconnects with U.S. railroads at several interchanges including Calexico, California. USCS estimates that 10,135 railcars crossed the border between Mexico and California in 1999, an increase of 26 percent since 1995.

Both the United States and Mexico continue to improve their highway and rail systems, ports, and airports to facilitate increasing commerce among countries in the Western Hemisphere. Unfortunately, the air–land–sea infrastructure that supports legitimate commerce between the United States and Mexico also facilitates the movement of illicit substances to, through, and beyond the Southwest Border.

In San Diego and Imperial Counties, all drugs of abuse are readily available. Methamphetamine, black tar heroin, and marijuana supplied by Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are the drugs of choice. Although methamphetamine use indicators have stabilized, the amount of the drug seized increased 36 percent between 1996 and 1999, and law enforcement continues to classify it as a serious threat. Marijuana trafficking continues at high levels, and cocaine seizures and abuse are increasing after a period of relative stability. Heroin is a growing threat while other dangerous drugs, including ketamine, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), Rohypnol, and MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), commonly known as ecstasy, are of increasing concern to law enforcement, as is the diversion of prescription drugs such as hydrocodones, Valium, and clonazepam (Rivotril, Klonopin).

Virtually all of the drugs smuggled into Southern California are the responsibility of Mexican DTOs: the Arellano-Felix Organization (Tijuana Cartel), the Miguel Angel Caro-Quintero Organization (Juarez Cartel), and the Amezcua-Contreras Organization (Colima Cartel). The Arellano-Felix Organization (AFO), which claims Baja California Norte as its area of control, is often cited as having the most significant impact on the San Diego–Imperial County area. Current reporting suggests that the Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada drug trafficking group out of Sinaloa, which allegedly has ties to the Juarez Cartel, is challenging the AFO’s control of the border narcotics market and creating havoc in Baja California Norte. The Zambada group is allegedly responsible for a series of high-profile killings there, including the murder of Tijuana Police Chief Alfredo de la Torre.

Mexican DTOs are the primary suppliers and distributors of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Local law enforcement describes a layered distribution system. The DTOs work through middlemen to supply local street gangs or independent dealers, mostly Hispanic. This marketing system has the advantage of insulating the major drug traffickers from the criminal activity associated with street-level distribution and law enforcement reaction to that activity. In December 1999 federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies identified 139 drug groups operating within Southern California and the Tijuana and Mexicali areas of Mexico.

At the street level, polydrug distribution appears to be the norm, except for crack cocaine. Crack is almost exclusively distributed by African-American street gangs, which are not normally described as polydrug groups. Hispanic gangs, for the most part, distribute more than one drug, usually heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana. Law enforcement estimates that street gangs account for 20 to 50 percent of all drug distribution at the street level. No fixed drug markets, crack houses, or shooting galleries were identified. Drug dealers are fluid in their methods, changing where and how they operate in response to law enforcement pressure. Once law enforcement identifies buildings, houses, or specific locations as drug areas, dealers simply move their operations elsewhere.

The Mexican Mafia (La Eme), a violent prison-based gang with 200–400 estimated members, controls a large portion of the retail drug trade in Southern California through violence, intimidation, and control of Hispanic street gangs that do its bidding. During a recent trial, one

member of La Eme claimed to have authorized the execution of as many as 40 individuals. He also testified that the gang controlled drug trafficking within California's prisons and taxed street gangs for the right to sell drugs. Intelligence reporting suggests that La Eme also acts as an intermediary between street gangs and organized criminal groups operating from Mexico. The Arellano-Felix Organization is known to recruit members of street gangs as enforcers and contract hit men. In a notorious example, the Arellano-Felix Organization employed members of the San Diego Logan Heights street gang, known to be affiliated with La Eme, to murder a rival at the Guadalajara airport; Mexican Cardinal Posadas-Ocampo was mistakenly killed instead.

Violence related to drug trafficking continues on both sides of the border. In April 2000, three Mexican law enforcement officers working with U.S. authorities were brutally murdered in Tijuana. Mexican law enforcement has attributed the murders to the Arellano-Felix Organization. Another crime that appears to have spanned the border is the assassination of Tijuana Police Chief Alfredo de la Torre. Investigating authorities have linked a vehicle reported stolen in Chula Vista, California, to the murder. The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) reported several violent incidents in March 2000. In one incident two USBP agents on the California side of the border were fired upon from a building in Mexico. In another, the driver of a vehicle that had crossed the border at Grays Wells in the El Centro area of Imperial County attempted to run an agent down. On August 16, 2000, a Border Patrol agent was shot in the back as he checked power generators along the border near the New River in Imperial County. Luckily, he was wearing a bulletproof vest and was not hurt.

Another facet of drug-related violence involves the sale of weapons to drug traffickers. Two recent incidents highlight the challenge posed by the weapons trade. Authorities traced weapons used to murder 18 men, women, and children in the Mexican town of El Sauzal, to a gun dealer in Escondido, California. Weapons used in the 1996 slayings of Mexican soldiers in Zapopan, and in a shootout in Culiacan between Mexican officials and drug traffickers were traced to the same dealer. The dealer and several associates were arrested in April 2000. In August 2000, federal agents seized a cache of 800 automatic and semiautomatic weapons in El Cajon, California, some of which were traced to the same Escondido gun shop. Three individuals, identified as firearms traffickers, were arrested. One of those arrested told agents that he converted weapons for members of the Arellano-Felix Organization. In addition to selling weapons, one of the individuals also sold a pound of methamphetamine to an undercover agent.

According to a November 2000 article from the Cambio, a Mexican web site, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) tried to make a cocaine-for-weapons deal with the Arellano-Felix Organization. Mexican authorities intervened and the deal never took place.

Drug-related crime is increasing in the region. The San Diego Police Department reports that from 1998 to 1999, felony drug arrests increased 5 percent and misdemeanor drug arrests increased 4 percent (from 5,212 to 5,448 and 7,371 to 7,662 respectively). Countywide drug-related arrests increased 9 percent from 1997 to 1999 (23,658 to 25,674). In each of the last 3 years—1997 to 1999—10 percent of the homicides in San Diego County were drug-related.

According to the National Institute of Justice 1999 Annual Report on Drug Use Among Adult and Juvenile Arrestees (ADAM), almost 64 percent of adult males and over 66 percent of adult females arrested in the San Diego area tested positive for drugs. This is down from 1997 when 73.4 percent of males and 73.2 percent of females tested positive for drugs. In 1999, male and female percentages were highest for marijuana at 36 percent and 29 percent respectively. Methamphetamine was also high at 36 percent for females and 26 percent for males. The converse of 1997 when the percentage of arrestees testing positive for drugs was highest for methamphetamine–42 percent of

females and 39 percent of males tested positive for the drug. Marijuana was second with 38 percent of male arrestees and 24 percent of females testing positive for the drug. The high percentage of arrestees testing positive for marijuana in 1998 and 1999 may be a reflection of the high activity in marijuana trafficking in the San Diego area. On the other hand, ADAM statistics reflect a stabilizing or downward trend in methamphetamine abuse. Multiple drug use declined over the 1997–1999 period: rates dropped from 46 to 22 percent for males and 53 to 29 percent for females. During this same time period, the highest rate of positives for multiple drug use were recorded for the 26- to 36-year-old age groups.

Among juveniles aged 9 to 18 arrested in the San Diego area, 56.1 tested positive for drugs according to ADAM statistics for 1998. Similar to adult arrestees, more juvenile arrestees tested positive for marijuana (48.1 percent) than any other drug. This may simply be a reflection of higher levels of marijuana-related activity. Methamphetamine was second with 12.2 percent. The percentage of multiple drug use was 10.8 percent. In comparison, 1997 ADAM statistics show that 62.6 percent of all juvenile arrestees in the San Diego area tested positive for drugs and 60.3 percent of violent offenders tested positive. As in 1998, marijuana (52.6 percent) and methamphetamine (17.2 percent) were the most abused drugs, but in 1997, multiple drug use (20.7 percent) exceeded methamphetamine use. According to the 1999 ADAM report, 56.8 percent of male juvenile arrestees and 47.7 percent of females tested positive for drugs.

In Imperial County, 6 of 24 homicides during the period 1997–1999 were drug-related. The Imperial County Narcotic Task Force reported 85 percent of 422 arrests in 1999 as drug-related. Felony drug arrests increased 25 percent from 1998 to 1999 (192 to 247) but misdemeanor drug arrests dropped 20 percent (138 to 111). The U.S. Sentencing Guidelines Report for Southern California reflects a 67.8 percent increase in drug offenses over the 4-year period 1995 to 1998. (See Table 3 on page 6.) Although drug trafficking continues to be of primary concern, other crime statistics, as reported by various sources, are mixed. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) reports that overall crime in the San Diego region has declined every year since 1991: violent crime decreased 41 percent and property crime declined 54 percent. For the 1-year period 1998 to 1999, the FBI Index rate

Table 3: Drug Offenses, Southern California

Offense	1995	1996	1997	1998	Amount of Change*	% of Change*
Cocaine	**126**	**108**	**93**	**87**	**-39**	**-31.0**
Crack	**9**	**5**	**20**	**8**	**-1**	**-11.1**
Heroin	**57**	**56**	**41**	**29**	**-28**	**-49.1**
Marijuana	**513**	**541**	**785**	**1,210**	**697**	**135.9**
Methamphetamine	**140**	**98**	**95**	**79**	**-61**	**-43.6**
Other Drugs	**4**	**15**	**24**	**12**	**8**	**200.0**
Total Drug	**849**	**823**	**1,058**	**1,425**	**576**	**67.8**
Total Non-Drug	**1,090**	**1,328**	**2,065**	**2,026**	**936**	**85.9**
Drug - % of Total	**43.8**	**38.3**	**33.9**	**41.3**		

*Represents comparison between 1995 and 1998.
Source: U.S. Sentencing Guidelines 1998.

declined 12 percent. In contrast, the San Diego Police Department reports that, from 1998 to 1999, felony drug arrests increased 5 percent, from 5,212 to 5,448, and misdemeanor drug arrests increased 4 percent, from 7,371 to 7,662. Countywide, drug-related arrests totaled 25,674 in 1999 compared to 23,658 in 1997, an increase of 9 percent over the 2-year period. In each of the last 3 years, 1997 to 1999, drug-related homicides accounted for 10 percent of the total in San Diego County.

The dichotomy in the reported crime rates is that, although the overall crime rate declined, drug arrests and offenses rose. The reduction in overall crime has been attributed to a combination of prevention and crime reduction strategies such as community-oriented policing and educational and peer court programs. Positive economic factors were also identified as a contributing factor. The increase in drug arrests and offenses could be attributed to a number of factors: an increase in law enforcement efforts to combat drug-related activity, tougher sentencing guidelines, or, most likely, a combination of those factors.

Methamphetamine

San Diego is no longer considered "the meth capital of the United States" but it continues to be a center for methamphetamine activity. According to a 1999 Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) report, Mexican DTOs are responsible for approximately 80 percent of methamphetamine distribution nationwide. Although Mexican DTOs continue to operate methamphetamine superlabs in the United States, the bulk of the methamphetamine consumed in the United States is produced in Mexico. San Diego remains one of the first destinations for the large quantities smuggled across the Southwest Border. From 1998 to 1999, seizures increased 85 percent in San Diego and Imperial Counties—from 312 to 577 kilograms. This represents 54 percent of the methamphetamine seized on the Southwest Border.

The DEA San Diego Field Division and local law enforcement report that methamphetamine production, trafficking, and abuse constitute the most serious drug threat in Southern California. The DEA San Diego Field Division reports that methamphetamine is the drug of choice and is available in all quantities. Imperial County is experiencing an increase in methamphetamine activity. DEA reports that bulk seizures of the drug are becoming more commonplace and that some distributors prefer to sell this drug in lieu of cocaine.

The San Diego Sheriff's Department identifies methamphetamine as a stable but major threat, and the Chula Vista Police Department classifies methamphetamine as a major and increasing threat. Drug use information indicates that methamphetamine use declined in the San Diego area in 1999. However, current anecdotal information and FY2000 data from the California Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs suggests that methamphetamine use may be increasing once again.

Information from law enforcement sources at the federal, state, and local levels in San Diego and Imperial Counties indicates that a large percentage of their resources are focused on the methamphetamine problem. In 1999, these agencies conducted 7,307 narcotic enforcement actions in San Diego and Imperial Counties, 3,024 or 42 percent of which were methamphetamine-related, the highest of eight arrest categories that also include cocaine-, crack cocaine-, heroin-, marijuana-, polydrug-, other dangerous drug-, and money laundering-related actions. The San Diego County Integrated Narcotic Task Force reports that 40 percent of drug arrests made during the first 8 months of fiscal year (FY) 2000 were methamphetamine-related (114 of 285).

Although most of the methamphetamine available in the district is smuggled across the border from Mexico, some is produced in the two-county area. In addition to the crime and violence associated with methamphetamine trafficking and abuse, there is a societal impact associated with the abuse and production of the drug. As a result of the proliferation of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories, particularly "home labs," children, law enforcement personnel, and civilians are increasingly exposed to the dangers of explosions, toxic chemicals, and lethal by-products of the manufacturing process. In addition to the human risk factor, toxic by-products of the methamphetamine manufacturing process can contaminate groundwater, soil, and the buildings housing the laboratories.

Children are also at risk for abuse and neglect by parents or caregivers addicted to the drug. San Diego is one of seven counties in California with a Drug Endangered Children (DEC) program. DEC coordinates efforts of law enforcement, the District Attorney's Office, and social services to respond to the plight of children exposed to toxic chemicals at clandestine laboratory sites. The Imperial County Narcotics Task Force reported that in 1999, they had several cases where children as young as 4 months had to be removed from homes where methamphetamine was being sold. In one case, three children were removed from a home described as a "pigsty" because "rotting food and trash were stacked 3 feet high" throughout. The children were in the care of their grandmother who was arrested for selling methamphetamine. The *San Diego Union-Tribune* reported that since 1998 the San Diego District Attorney's DEC program has rescued more than 200 children from homes where methamphetamine laboratories operated.

Abuse

Although methamphetamine continues to be classified as the number one threat in the region, methamphetamine use appears to have declined from previous high levels. Various drug use reports indicate that methamphetamine use is down in West Coast cities and areas of the Southwest. According to ADAM statistics, the percentage of adult arrestees in the San Diego area testing positive for methamphetamine dropped from 40 percent in 1997 to about 33 percent in 1998. Juvenile arrestees testing positive for methamphetamine similarly declined, from 17 to 12.2 percent.

In San Diego, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) estimated rate of emergency department methamphetamine/speed mentions decreased from 30 per 100,000 in 1995 to 24 per 100,000 in 1999. Methamphetamine overdose deaths were at the lowest level since at least 1992. According to the California Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, treatment admissions for "amphetamines" declined slightly from 1995 to 1997 in both San Diego and Imperial Counties. Admissions in San Diego fell from 3,933 in 1995 to 3,783 in 1997. Imperial County amphetamine admissions decreased from 257 in 1995 to 192 in 1997.

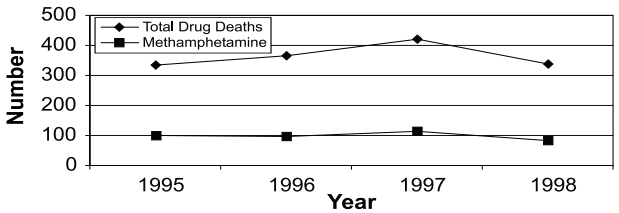
Between FY1998 and FY1999, methamphetamine admissions in San Diego County fell 2.6 percent. During the same period, Imperial County admissions declined 34 percent, from 186 to 122. Overall, the number of individuals seeking treatment for methamphetamine abuse declined in both counties between FY1998 and FY1999.

More Caucasians than Hispanics sought treatment for methamphetamine abuse in San Diego in both fiscal years. Imperial County reports that more Caucasians than Hispanics sought treatment in FY1998 but in the following year Hispanics outnumbered Caucasians. In San Diego and Imperial Counties more females than males sought treatment for methamphetamine abuse in FY1998 and FY1999. The age of those seeking treatment ranged from under 18 to over 55 but was most heavily concentrated in the 21- to 40-year bracket.

> The latest figures from the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs indicate that methamphetamine use may be increasing again. The number of those seeking treatment for methamphetamine use in San Diego and Imperial counties rose from 4,226 in FY1999 to 4,438 in FY2000, a 5 percent increase.

According to DAWN, total drug deaths in the San Diego area increased yearly between 1995 and 1997 when the number of deaths peaked at 419. In 1998 that number declined to 338. (See Chart 1.) During that same period, the number of deaths in which methamphetamine was mentioned decreased from 99 deaths in 1995 to 84 in 1998. The 1998 figure is the lowest since 1993 when only 77 deaths were reported.

Chart 1. Methamphetamine-Related Deaths San Diego, 1995–1998



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 availability of methamphetamine in San Diego and Imperial Counties is constant, and there has been no significant change in either price or purity. In their responses to the National Drug Intelligence Center's (NDIC) Drug Threat Survey, the San Diego Police Department, the San Diego Sheriff's Department, and the Chula Vista Police Department rated availability of methamphetamine as high. The San Diego Sheriff's Department and the San Diego Police Department rated the methamphetamine threat as major but unchanging; the Chula Vista Police Department identified the threat as major and increasing. The San Diego Police Department reports that it encounters methamphetamine in both rock and powder form in areas formerly dominated by crack. Currently, methamphetamine accounts for 50 percent of North San Diego Integrated Drug Task Force seizures; amounts seized range from 1 to 50 pounds. The Task Force reports the methamphetamine market is stable, prices are steady, and purity is between 20 and 94 percent.

The most recent methamphetamine price and purity figures available from the Narcotic Information Network (NIN) for San Diego and Imperial Counties indicate slight increases in price and purity. (See Table 4.)

Seizures of methamphetamine at California POEs increased from 312 pounds in 1998 to 577 pounds in 1999. The California Border Alliance Group (CBAG) reports that 1999 seizures in San Diego and Imperial Counties accounted for 54 percent (577 of 1,060 kg) of the methamphetamine seized at the Southwest Border, the highest since 1996. The California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement (BNE) and the California Highway Patrol Border Division seized an additional 73 pounds of methamphetamine and 9,938 pounds of pseudoephedrine in 1999. CBAG also reports seizures of the precursors ephedrine and pseudoephedrine and of the essential chemicals hydriodic acid and iodine at POEs.

> A recent report from CBAG indicates that the number and amount of methamphetamine seizures in the California-Mexico border area decreased during the first six months of 2000. They further report that more of the drug is being crossed at other points along the SWB.

In 1998, 221 kilograms of amphetamine were seized at the Southwest Border, almost three times

Table 4. Methamphetamine Price and Purity, March 2000

County	Amount	Price (dollars)	Purity Range (percent)
San Diego	**Gram**	**80**	**25 to 53**
	1/8 Ounce	**160**	
	1/4 Ounce	**150 to 220**	
	Ounce	**500 to 800**	
	1/2 Pound	**4,100 to 5,200**	
	Pound	**5,500**	**12 to 93**
Imperial	**Ounce**	**450**	
	Pound	**6,500 to 8,000**	

Source: Narcotic Information Network, San Diego/Imperial County, March 2000.

the amount seized in 1997. The Mexican DTOs are marketing amphetamine as methamphetamine. This may be an indication that Mexican DTOs are substituting phenylpropanolamine (PPA), either because federal controls are making it difficult to obtain the precursors ephedrine and pseudoephedrine or because of economics: PPA may be cheaper than either ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, thereby increasing the profit margin.

Violence

Methamphetamine addicts suffering the effects of prolonged or chronic abuse often display psychotic behavior such as paranoia, auditory and visual hallucinations, or mood disturbances and exhibit a tendency toward violence. In March 2000, the San Diego Sheriff's Department stated that "methamphetamine is a very dangerous drug that has been traced to violent criminal activity." It further reports that 70 percent of adult male and about 60 percent of juvenile arrestees test positive for methamphetamine, and comments, "Although those figures are down from previous years, they are still the highest in the nation."

In response to the NDIC's Gang Survey 2000, local law enforcement indicated that street gangs in their districts are involved in the distribution of methamphetamine and other drugs. In addition to the violent activity related to drug trafficking, these gangs also commit criminal acts such as assaults, drive-by shootings, homicides, auto thefts and carjackings. La Eme, which controls a portion of the drug trade in Southern California through street gangs, uses violence to maintain that control and expand its power base. The almost complete wholesale control of drug distribution in both San Diego and Imperial Counties by Mexican DTOs precludes some of the violence usually associated with the struggle for control of drug markets.

Production

Mexican criminals continue to be the primary methamphetamine producers in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Most use the ephedrine/pseudoephedrine reduction method, which produces greater amounts (10 lb or more) per cook. In addition to ephedrine/pseudoephedrine, this method uses red phosphorus and hydriodic acid. One source of pseudoephedrine used in the manufacture of methamphetamine is over-the-counter cold tablets. It appears that, in some cases, methamphetamine manufacturers use the entire tablet, including binders, which produces a poorer quality product because it lowers the purity and adds weight. Production of poor quality methamphetamine could be an attempt to cut costs, the result of difficulty in obtaining precursors, or both.

Because of the high levels of production, Southern California was once known as the methamphetamine capital of the United States.

> The Mexican Attorney General's Office reported that 17 clandestine laboratories for making synthetic drugs have been dismantled in Michoacan. Eleven laboratories were dismantled in 1999 and six in the first 4 months of 2000. The report did not identify the types of drugs manufactured in the laboratories, however, Michoacan is known to be a center for methamphetamine production.
>
> A report from the Mexican newspapers dated October 17, 2000, stated that authorities in that country discovered an underground crystal [methamphetamine] laboratory on the highway between Mexicali, Mexico, and the Mexicali Airport.

However, pressure from law enforcement in Southern California is causing operators of the larger laboratories to move further north to

Orange and San Bernardino Counties, east to Arizona, and south to Baja California Norte.

There is a continuing trend in Southern California toward small "tweaker labs" that produce ounce to pound quantities for personal use and sale. Most small laboratories are seized from residences, but laboratories also have been found in sheds in remote locations and in the trunks of cars. While operators of most small laboratories use the ephedrine/pseudoephedrine method used by Mexican DTOs, there have been reports of a few using the "Nazi" method, which requires a shorter cook time and uses anhydrous ammonia in place of red phosphorus. The DEA San Diego Field Division seized 41 methamphetamine laboratories and three pseudoephedrine extraction laboratories in 1998. DEA reported 43 laboratory seizures in 1999. NIN reported that 62 laboratories were seized in San Diego County and 5 in Imperial County. NIN figures include additional laboratory seizures not reported to DEA. Methamphetamine laboratories are generally found in sparsely populated areas. In San Diego County, most of the laboratories seized were east and northeast of San Diego; in Imperial County, the laboratories were located west and northwest of El Centro.

San Diego County authorities responding to the National Drug Threat Survey estimate the cost of cleaning up a laboratory at $3,000. In 1999, DEA spent over $83,000 on 46 laboratory cleanups. This figure does not include the remediation cost of returning a laboratory site to its former condition, that is, removing contaminants from the water supply, soil, or structures in which the laboratories were operated. A recent report from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Superfund Program in San Francisco indicated that neither the EPA nor the state of California is funding the decontamination of structures used as methamphetamine laboratories. The cost of assessment and cleanup of structures can reach as high as $50,000 per unit.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS) sources report that methamphetamine producers set up laboratories on public land and dump the toxic by-products directly on the ground, causing serious environmental damage. At the very least, the resulting cleanup is costly; in the worst case scenario the damage to the environment is irreparable. The USFS also reports cases of traffickers who enter abandoned laboratory sites and set up "dirt labs" where they scrub the contaminated soil to recover methamphetamine and precursor residue.

> The California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement reports that a very enterprising methamphetamine cooker cut up the sheets used to strain the product and then sold the pieces to methamphetamine users. The users soak the pieces of cloth in drinkable liquids to ingest the methamphetamine.

Precursor and essential chemical trafficking is another methamphetamine-related problem facing law enforcement in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Because large quantities of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are not readily available in the district, methamphetamine manufacturers and precursor "brokers" are forced to purchase products containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine over the counter, smuggle the chemicals into the area from Mexico, or obtain them from unscrupulous chemical companies. In addition, these criminal broker organizations may also set up laboratories to extract the ephedrine or pseudoephedrine from combination products such as cold medicines.

In some instances, traffickers may acquire case quantities of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine products from operators of convenience stores and liquor stores. These store operators usually purchase the products from suppliers on the East Coast. The DEA San Diego Field Division and CBAG report that Middle Eastern criminals are the largest single ethnic group distributing pseudoephedrine tablets at both the wholesale and retail levels in the San Diego area. In January 2000, the California Highway Patrol seized 380,000 dosage units of pseudoephedrine from a Jordanian who was traveling from Vancouver to Los Angeles.

The smuggling of precursors and essential chemicals, both north and south, continues at the

California–Mexico border. Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine seizures in Southern California in 1999 totaled 67 kilograms compared to 408 kilograms in 1998. In 1999, 675 pounds of iodine were seized. In December 1999, USCS at the Calexico POE seized 5 gallons of hydriodic acid that was concealed inside oil containers in the trunk of a car. In February 2000, USCS inspectors seized 217 pounds of crystalline iodine that was concealed in the seat of a pickup truck. The truck was driven by an alleged member of a Los Angeles street gang.

Federal and state regulations have made the purchase of precursor and essential chemicals within the United States increasingly difficult, forcing Mexican DTOs to obtain precursors from other countries. The major source countries for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are China, India, Poland, and Germany. In addition to tightening the supply, stringent regulation has resulted in increased prices for these chemicals on the black market. One example is the price of iodine, which costs about $1,995 per 50 kilogram compared to the black market price of $9,000–$9,500. The most recent prices reported by NIN are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Precursor and Essential Chemical Prices

Precursor and Essential Chemical Prices Reported by NIN

Ephedrine	**lb**	**$2,000–$3,000**
Ephedrine	**55 lb**	**$50,000–$80,000**
Freon R 11	**5 gallons (100 lb)**	**$1,000–$2,500**
Hydriodic acid	**gallon**	**$3,000–$3,200**
Iodine	**lb**	**$100–$200**
Iodine	**50 kg**	**$9,000–$9,500**

Precursor Prices Reported by DEA San Diego Field Division

Red phosphorus	**50 lb**	**$5,000**
L-ephedrine	**barrel U.S.C.**	**$70,000–$120,000**
Pseudoephedrine pills	**case (144 bottles)**	**$2,500 ($1,500 last quarter)**

Transportation

The Southern California District continues to be a destination area for methamphetamine. However, it is principally a transshipment point; most of the methamphetamine smuggled into the area from Mexico is destined for other locations in California and the United States. A variety of conveyances and concealment methods are used in smuggling methamphetamine into the United States. The most popular places of concealment in commercial and personal vehicles include hidden compartments, air bag compartments, quarter panels, and gas tanks. USCS recently seized 21 pounds of methamphetamine concealed inside an air bag compartment and a front seat cushion, 25 pounds concealed behind the rear seat of a car, and 27 pounds from the gas tank of a pickup truck.

Traffickers frequently use couriers; the drug may be hand-carried or concealed on the body (body-packed). In two incidents at the San Ysidro POE in December 1999, a resident flying from San Diego to New Orleans attempted to smuggle 2 kilograms taped to his body. In an incident at the Tecate POE in April 2000, a pedestrian tried to enter with 8 pounds strapped around his waist.

Distribution

Mexican polydrug organizations, usually working in conjunction with middlemen, are the major suppliers of methamphetamine at the wholesale level in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Hispanic street gangs and independent dealers and groups (Caucasian and Hispanic) are the main distributors at the street level. The two-county area is also home to independent laboratory operators who produce small amounts of methamphetamine for their own consumption and for sale.

In February 2000, narcotics agents in Mexicali, Mexico, seized 85 pounds of methamphetamine. The street value of the seizure could range from $250,000 to over $1.5 million, depending on whether it was destined for sale in Mexico or the United States. The 85 pounds seized probably represents only a small amount of the methamphetamine being produced in Baja California Norte.

Wholesale

Most of the methamphetamine found in the district is produced in Mexico. The border cities in San Diego and Imperial Counties continue to be used as methamphetamine transshipment points to U.S. locales and the smuggling of methamphetamine continues to increase. The primary sources of supply are Mexican DTOs such as the Arellano-Felix Organization, the Amezcua-Contreras Organization, and the Miguel Angel Caro-Quintero Organization. According to a 1998 U.S. Attorney report, Mexican organizations have come to dominate wholesale methamphetamine trafficking in the United States because they have ready access to precursor chemicals in Mexico, they control well-established drug distribution networks, and they produce large quantities of methamphetamine on a regular basis.

At the wholesale level, Mexican DTOs normally work through middlemen who use known dealers to distribute the methamphetamine at the street level. Most of the drug distribution groups at the wholesale and retail levels are polydrug in nature.

Responses to a survey conducted by NIN indicated that approximately 54 criminal organizations transport and distribute methamphetamine and 14 traffic precursor chemicals in the Southern California and Mexico Border Regions. They also identified 76 polydrug organizations or groups, some of which most likely are involved in methamphetamine trafficking.

Retail

The primary retail distributors of methamphetamine in the district are Mexican criminals and Mexican-American criminal groups. Local independent dealers, street gangs, Caucasians, and biker gangs also distribute the drug. The Chula Vista Police Department states that Mexicans, as well as Caucasians and biker gangs, distribute methamphetamine in its area. DEA reports that the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club is establishing a chapter in Tijuana; however, a working relationship between the Hells Angels and Mexican DTOs has not been confirmed.

According to the San Diego Sheriff's Department, the dominant distributors of methamphetamine in San Diego County are Caucasians with connections to the Arellano-Felix Organization. The San Diego Police Department describes a layered drug distribution network whereby Mexican DTOs deal with middlemen who then work with known dealers—from gangs to individuals—who handle street sales. Most of the drug dealing at the street level is polydrug.

Another criminal influence that impacts methamphetamine distribution in Southern

HISPANIC STREET GANGS

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

CRIPS AND BLOODS

There are approximately 65,000 African-American gang members in California. The majority of them are Crips and Bloods. The gang members are violent and use high-powered automatic weapons. Criminal activities include narcotics trafficking, robbery, burglary, grand theft, assault, drive-by shooting, murder, and witness tampering.

California is the Mexican Mafia, a prison-based gang also known as "La Eme." La Eme controls a portion of the drug distribution in Southern California through control of street gangs like the Logan Heights gang. La Eme also has ties to the prison-based gang Aryan Brotherhood that, in turn, has ties to outlaw motorcycle gangs. It is believed that Aryan Brotherhood is linked to the methamphetamine trade through its association with these groups. Other street gangs distributing methamphetamine in the San Diego area are the Vista Home Boys, Barrio Fallbrook Locos, Imperials, Lakeside Gangsters, Colonia Eden Gardens, Barrio Encitas, Legend Kings, Casa De Oro Bloods (African-American and Hispanic), Spring Valley Locos, and Barrio San Marcos. These gangs are also involved in the distribution of other drugs, including marijuana and heroin.

The North County Regional Task Force in San Diego reports that street gangs account for about 50 percent of the drug distribution in the county. The major Hispanic gangs were identified as Pasole, Center Street Logos, Mesa Logos operating in Oceanside, and the Vista Home Boys in Vista. In Carlsbad, the major gangs are the Carlsbad Logos, South Los, and Barrio San Marcos. Also mentioned were the Diablos and Westside Gang in Escondido and the Fallbrook Logos in Fallbrook. Drug distribution is the gangs' primary business, and although they distribute all drugs, methamphetamine is predominant. The Task Force further reports that all Hispanic gangs owe their allegiance to the Mexican Mafia (La Eme). Graffiti displaying various Spanish gang logos is usually followed by Sur 13: the thirteenth letter of the alphabet is M, "eme" in Spanish. The Crips, an African-American street gang, also distributes methamphetamine in addition to the usual crack cocaine, according to Task Force reporting.

The Imperial County Task Force identified 34 street gangs with more than 850 members. Most of the Hispanic street gangs are involved in polydrug distribution that includes methamphetamine, heroin, and marijuana. One gang, Chicali, is a prison-based gang. Chicali is linked to and controls some of the Hispanic street gangs that distribute drugs.

Heroin

Heroin continues to be smuggled into the district, mostly through Southern California POEs. Virtually all the heroin that is available is of Mexican origin, predominantly black tar, but also brown powder. However, South American heroin has also been seized in the district. Mexican DTOs are the major sources of the heroin smuggled across the California–Mexico border. Heroin is also transshipped through the region to other destinations.

Once heroin is smuggled into the region, wholesale and retail distribution is handled by a variety of groups, including street gangs and independent dealers, some Caucasian but predominantly Hispanic. In 1999, various law enforcement agencies in San Diego and Imperial Counties conducted 595 narcotic enforcement actions involving heroin. This represented 8 percent of the total; however, this figure may be understated as there were 503 polydrug actions in which heroin most likely was involved.

To varying degrees, local law enforcement identifies heroin as an ongoing threat. The San Diego Sheriff's Department and the Chula Vista Police Department classify the heroin threat as moderate and stable. The San Diego Police Department classifies the heroin threat as moderate but increasing and reports a growing number of younger users. These sources also classify abuse as moderate; however, according to the California Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, drug use indicators for FY1998–FY2000 show an increase in treatment admissions for heroin abuse over the 3-year period. However, information from the DEA San Diego Field Division indicates that availability may be high—black tar is available in multikilogram quantities. The DEA Imperial County Resident Office reports that it is encountering heroin in "traditionally methamphetamine/cocaine-related local impact investigations." It further reports that "significant amounts"—1/2- to 1-pound quantities—are now common in the county.

Abuse

According to a May 2000 open source report, the trend in San Diego and Imperial Counties toward younger heroin users is reflected at the national level. The average age for heroin users in the United States declined from 27.4 years in 1988 to 17.6 in 1997 and use among females increased dramatically. It is further reported that heroin use has moved to middle-class suburbs. The user population covers a broad spectrum from white-collar professionals in affluent suburbs to kids in small farm communities. The Imperial County Narcotics Task Force reports that heroin is the drug of choice among Mexican migrant workers.

California drug abuse indicators for the most recent reporting period show heroin use increasing, particularly in northern San Diego County. Between FY1998 and FY1999, drug treatment admissions for heroin increased in both San Diego and Imperial Counties. In San Diego County, admissions rose 7.9 percent from 4,663 to 5,035, and in Imperial County, admissions increased 11.2 percent from 232 to 258. Individuals from 18 to 55 years of age sought treatment for heroin abuse but most were in the 26- to 50-year-old group; they

According to recent data prepared by the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, the trend toward increased heroin use in Imperial County continued in FY2000. However, these same figures reflect a downward trend for heroin use in San Diego County.

A recent DEA San Diego report indicates that Imperial County may be experiencing the beginning of a heroin epidemic in the small cities of Winterhaven and Bard. Both cities are located in the southeast area of the county, near the California–Arizona border and Yuma, Arizona.

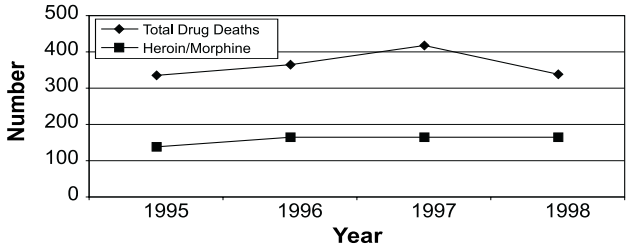
According to a June 2000 news report, heroin-related deaths have occurred in Ireland and Scotland. In Ireland, officials reported that eight users died and seven have been hospitalized. Glasgow, Scotland, officials reported 16 deaths and 12 additional cases of a "mystery illness" linked to heroin use by injection. Black tar heroin is reportedly not available in Ireland or Scotland. However, authorities in Glasgow believe that users were taking a crudely produced form of heroin that was difficult to dissolve and using excessive levels of citric acid to break it down. Doctors believe that injecting such large amounts of citric acid into the tissue causes localized damage, which allows the bacteria to spread. All victims in Glasgow injected heroin directly into tissue and all had used citric acid to dissolve the drug. Pathology reports on the Glasgow victims indicated citric acid present at six times the normal level. Authorities in Ireland have not yet identified a link between the cases in the United States or Scotland. There also were 14 cases of the illness reported in London, England; seven of the victims died.

were predominantly male (over 65 percent) and white.

According to the Community Epidemiology Work Group (CEWG), the number of users injecting the drug is increasing. There is growing concern that the injection of heroin may be increasing among young users. Deadly results have occurred in California from the intravenous use of black tar heroin. In 1999, five addicts in San Francisco died from bacterial infections contracted after injecting the drug. The bacteria blamed for the death, Clostridium perfringens, thrives in black tar heroin and causes a flesh-eating infection called necrotising fasciitis. Health officials report that at least four people were treated in Northern California for "wound botulism," an infection which attacks the blood and central nervous system, causing paralysis and death. The deaths were traced to a contaminated batch of Mexican black tar heroin.

The most recent available DAWN Medical Examiner Data for the San Diego area show that heroin/morphine-related deaths increased from 137 in 1995 to 165 in 1996 but remained level at 165 through 1998. (See Chart 2.)

Chart 2. Heroin/Morphine-Related Deaths San Diego, 1995–1998



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

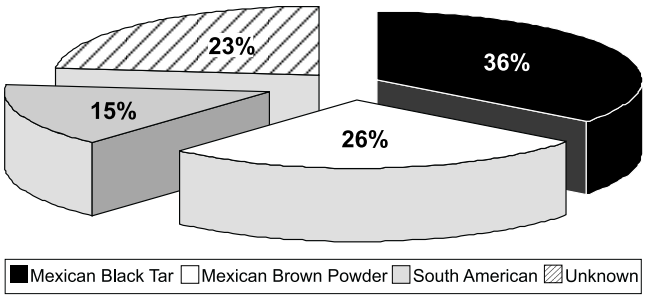
Black tar and, to a lesser extent, brown powdered heroin from Mexico predominate in the western half of the United States. The DEA San Diego Field Division reports that black tar heroin currently is available in multikilogram quantities and that the purity level has remained relatively high. In September 2000, DEA reported purity levels of up to 70 percent and the price from $800 to $1,450 per ounce, down from the $1,000 to $3,000 reported for 1999. The DEA in Carlsbad reports that Mexican heroin is readily available in the area and sells for about $1,000 per ounce.

In 1999, a kilogram of 79 percent pure black tar heroin sold for $40,000 to $75,000 in Imperial County. A kilogram of 50 to 65 percent pure black tar heroin sold for $80,000 to $90,000 in San Diego County. NIN quotes the price of black tar heroin in Imperial County, as of March 2000, at $14,000 per pound; this equates to $30,800 per kilogram. The DEA in Imperial County reports

that heroin is available in significant amounts—1/2- to 1-pound quantities. They further report that the drug sells for about $800 per ounce, slightly less than the reported average street price.

As reported by the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), seizures of heroin in San Diego and Imperial Counties increased 36 percent from 1996 to 1999 (73.5 kg to 99.7 kg). The 1999 figures represent 41 percent of the total seized on the Southwest Border compared to 46 percent of the total seized in 1996. The amount of heroin seized continued to increase during the first six months of 2000. Heroin seizures reported for 1998 indicate that Mexican and, to a lesser extent, South American heroin are being smuggled into the California border region. (See Chart 3.)

Chart 3. Types of Heroin Seized at the California Border



Source: California Border Alliance Group, *Narcotic Threat Assessment FY2001*, 1 April 2000.

Violence

Heroin use is not normally associated with violence; however, heroin abusers may commit crimes such as robbery and burglary to support their drug habits. Heroin trafficking, like the trafficking of other drugs, is accompanied by criminal activity. Criminal groups and individuals involved in the trafficking and distribution of heroin may use violence to protect drug shipments or to maintain control over distribution in a given area.

Street gangs, many of which are known to commit violent acts, are involved in the distribution of drugs in both San Diego and Imperial Counties. Local law enforcement estimates that street gangs distribute 20 to 50 percent of the drugs in their areas. Respondents to the NDIC Gang Survey 2000 identify a number of street gangs involved in the distribution of multiple drugs including heroin. These gangs are also involved in drive-by shooting, homicide, carjacking, and home invasion crimes, most of which are not classified as drug-related.

Another measure of the relationship between criminal behavior and drug use is the percentage of arrestees testing positive for drugs, in this case opiates. According to ADAM, opiate use among adult male arrestees increased slightly between 1995 and 1998. In 1995, 8 percent of male arrestees tested positive for opiate use while 9 percent tested positive in 1999, a one percent increase. Comparatively, the percentage of female arrestees testing positive for opiate use decreased from 12 percent in 1995 to 10.9 percent in 1999, a one percent decrease. Opiate use among male juvenile offenders (ages 9 through 18), decreased slightly during the same time frame, from 1 percent in 1995 to .4 percent in 1999. ADAM did not report any data for female juvenile offenders in 1995, however, for 1999 ADAM reports that 2.3 percent of female juveniles tested positive for opiates.

Production

Mexico is the dominant source of heroin available in the western United States. In 1999, the U.S. Government estimated that drug traffickers in Mexico cultivated 2 percent of the world's opium poppy crop and produced an estimated 4.3 metric tons of heroin. Opium continues to be produced in western Mexico along the spine of the Sierra Madre, an area

extending from the states of Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango south to the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. Seizure reporting indicates that significant quantities of heroin and opium gum originate in the state of Michoacan. In an important development, the government of Mexico reports that Mexican heroin traffickers are implementing new cultivation strategies to increase opium poppy yields. Poppy plants that used to produce 1 to 2 bulbs now produce 9 to 10 bulbs. Plants grown in Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Durango can each produce 20 to 30 bulbs measuring 1¾ to 2 inches in diameter.

Historically, Mexican heroin traffickers have produced and marketed only black tar and brown powdered heroin, but the seizure of two heroin production laboratories in the last 2 years indicates that Mexican organizations may be working with Colombian chemists to produce white heroin. However, no recent information confirms the current production of Mexican white heroin.

Transportation

Mexican DTOs control the transportation and smuggling of heroin into and through Southern California. The biggest percentage is smuggled through the POEs: from Tijuana via San Ysidro, from Mexicali via Calexico, and through Otay Mesa and Tecate. As with other drugs smuggled into the United States from Mexico, heroin is moved through Mexico to the California–Mexico border, mostly overland. Mexico has several major highways (Highways 1, 2, and 5) that terminate at the border. On the California side, there are major routes (Interstates 5, 15, 215, and Highway 111) and secondary routes that radiate north from the border and interconnect with west-east routes (Interstates 8, 10, 40). Transporters use these highways to move heroin overland to stash houses and major population centers in California and other states. (See Maps, pages vi and 3.)

Smugglers use various means to transport heroin: vehicles, commercial airlines, mailing services, and couriers. Illegal immigrants and migrant workers often serve as couriers, smuggling small amounts of heroin across the border. Females are used more often than males to move large quantities of heroin. In May 2000, USCS inspectors at San Ysidro arrested two women after 28 pounds of heroin and 64 pounds of cocaine were found in a hidden compartment of a personal vehicle. The street value of the drugs was estimated at $1.3 million. The authorities stated that it was unusual to find both heroin and cocaine in one shipment.

Other recent seizures at California POEs include 7.6 pounds of heroin seized from a pedestrian and two seizures, 22 pounds and 6 pounds, from personal vehicles. In the case of the pedestrian, the heroin was hidden inside the false wall of a hard-shell suitcase; in the vehicles, one shipment of heroin was hidden in a quarter panel and the other was hidden in a battery.

Distribution

The wholesale distribution of heroin in Southern California is controlled by Mexico-based DTOs. These organizations smuggle heroin into the area, where the drug is distributed locally and transshipped to cities, particularly Los Angeles, and to areas across the United States. At the local level, heroin is distributed through middlemen to dealers such as gangs, loosely formed groups, and independents.

Wholesale

Mexican criminals, most of whom maintain a Mexicali or Tijuana base, are the principal wholesale distributors for heroin in Southern California. They rely on established smuggling and distribution networks to move heroin to market. Mexican or Mexican-American criminals with ties to the Mexican states of Durango, Michoacan, Nuevo Leon, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas usually distribute black tar heroin. Two major Mexican DTOs dominate heroin smuggling across the U.S.–Mexico border, the Arellano-Felix Organization and the Miguel Angel Caro-Quintero Organization. The San Diego Sheriff's Department reported that Tijuana and Nayarit are the main source areas for heroin in San Diego County. It also reports that heroin is transshipped through San Diego County to Los Angeles and other cities.

In June 2000, DEA agents moved against a major heroin distribution group that extended from Nayarit, Mexico, to San Diego and cities across the United States including Albuquerque, Anchorage, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Honolulu, and Los Angeles. Operating out of Los Angeles, the group dispatched young girls and elderly men, traveling alone, carrying 1- to 2-pound packages of heroin to various destinations. The distribution group was successful at establishing customer bases in new cities. One of the methods used to market its heroin was to set up "shooting galleries" near methadone clinics to lure customers who were in methadone treatment programs. The group dealt in pound- to street-level quantities of 60 to 85 percent pure heroin, selling hundreds of thousands of doses per month.

Retail

As with the distribution of other drugs, major trafficking organizations usually supply heroin to middlemen. These middlemen normally work with known dealers who distribute the heroin at the street level. The street dealers include various drug distribution groups, Hispanic and Caucasian street gangs, and independents. Some of the San Diego gangs involved in the distribution of heroin include the Vistas Home Boys, Barrio Fallbrook Locos, and Barrio Encinitas, all Hispanic. In San Marcos, the Barrio San Marcos and South Los gangs distribute heroin and other drugs. On January 19, 2000, police arrested two men in Barrio Logan who were selling heroin and cocaine from their car. In April 2000, DEA agents in Imperial County seized 190 grams of black tar heroin in the business district of El Centro. The heroin was wrapped in clear plastic and black electrical tape. Heroin is frequently packaged in clear plastic, but the San Diego Police Department reports that street-level doses of heroin may be packaged in plastic that has been cut from grocery bags and then heat-sealed. Aluminum foil is another form of packaging used.

Cocaine

Cocaine continues to flow into the San Diego–Imperial County area from Mexico. Law enforcement reports that Mexican DTOs are the major sources of cocaine. While the bulk of it is smuggled overland through and between the POEs, the San Diego Maritime Task Force and USCS Air and Marine Interdiction Coordination Center (AMICC) both reported an increase in cocaine-related activity in 1999.

Although most of the cocaine smuggled into the district is transshipped to Los Angeles and other areas, cocaine continues to be classified as a threat in San Diego and Imperial Counties. During the last quarter of 1999, federal, state, and local authorities in the two-county area conducted 185 law enforcement actions directly related to powdered and crack cocaine (also known as rock cocaine in Southern California). Local law enforcement reports that both powdered and crack cocaine are available in the area but that crack is more prevalent at the street level than powdered cocaine.

Abuse

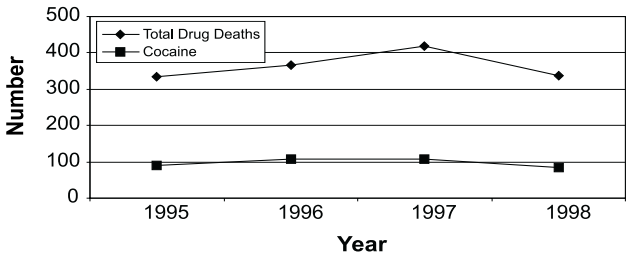
According to the California Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, in FY1999, cocaine use indicators for San Diego increased. In San Diego County, most of those seeking treatment for cocaine/crack were between 26 and 45 years old but there was a notable increase in the 21- to 25-year-old group between FY1998 and FY1999. The number of males seeking treatment for cocaine exceeded the number of females in both years. Treatment admissions for cocaine/crack rose 12 percent over FY1998 in San Diego County but declined over the same period in Imperial County.

> The most recent data from the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs indicate that overall cocaine use in San Diego and Imperial Counties may be stabilizing. In FY2000, treatment admissions totaled 1,310 compared to 1,331 for FY1999, a decrease of 2 percent.

Based on treatment data, fewer individuals sought treatment for cocaine abuse in Imperial County than in San Diego County, but the demographics of the users are similar. Both counties reported use among African Americans, Caucasians, and Hispanics. In Imperial County the predominant cocaine abusers were African Americans and Hispanics, but in San Diego County the predominant abusers were African Americans and Caucasians. The largest user group according to age was 26 to 36, although users in the 21 to 25 age group increased from FY1998 to FY1999. Although cocaine use indicators were up over the 2-year period, local law enforcement classifies cocaine/ crack abuse as moderate.

The April 2000 DAWN Medical Examiner Data reported for San Diego shows cocaine-related deaths declined between 1995 and 1998. In 1995 there were 91 deaths; that figure dropped to 83 in 1998, a 9 percent decrease. (See Chart 4.)

Chart 4. Cocaine-Related Deaths San Diego, 1995–1998



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 supply of powdered and crack cocaine in San Diego and Imperial Counties has remained steady. While quantities of powdered cocaine are available, the more significant problem is the use of crack among the African-American population in the inner-city neighborhoods of San Diego. Price, purity, and supply remained relatively stable over the past 3 years, but price data revealed a marginal increase for the last quarter of 1999 and the first quarter of 2000. Cocaine seizures also increased during the same period. The March 2000 figures quoted by NIN for San Diego County show cocaine currently selling for $15,000 to $19,000 per kilogram with purity levels at 75 to 80 percent for ounce through pound quantities. This compares to $8,000 to $16,000 per kilogram in 1999. The current price for cocaine in Imperial County is $13,000 per kilogram and purity levels range from 40 to 55 percent. DEA at the San Ysidro Resident Office reports that multiple kilogram quantities of cocaine are available at $14,500 per kilogram.

Cocaine seizures are also increasing. CBAG reports that cocaine seizures increased in 1999 and continued to increase in the first six months of 2000. Seizures during the first six months of 2000 accounted for 24 percent of the amount seized on the SWB during that time period. They further report that there has been very little change in price and purity since 1995. The DEA San Diego Field Division reported that the number of cocaine seizures decreased in the July–September 1999 quarter, but increased in the first two quarters of FY2000. However, EPIC reports that amounts seized in the California arrival zone decreased from 8,250 kilograms in 1998 to 7,117 kilograms in 1999.

Violence

Transporters and distributors of cocaine use criminal alliances and violence to further their drug trade. Mexican DTOs are known to hire street gang members as enforcers and contract hit men to protect their market. Several years ago, the Arellano-Felix Organization contracted with members of the Logan Street Gang to assassinate a rival. In other instances gangs and drug dealers use violence and intimidation to protect their “turf” or to extract “taxes” from other distributors. Intimidation usually includes threats of violence against distributors’ family members and, in some cases, law enforcement and justice personnel. In June 2000, authorities arrested a San Diego man who had been implicated in a plot to kill a judge, a prosecutor, and a sheriff’s deputy. A Skyline Drive gang member, who is serving a life sentence for murder, allegedly ordered the killings from prison. In the process of executing a search warrant at the subject’s home, authorities found 37 rocks of cocaine.

Another indication of the connection between crime, violence, and cocaine is the number of arrestees testing positive for cocaine use. According to ADAM, the percentage of male arrestees testing positive for cocaine in San Diego was 16.5 percent in 1999, this compares to 28 percent in 1995, an 11.5 percent decrease. Among female arrestees, 22.6 percent tested positive for cocaine in 1999, a 5 percent drop from 1995 figures. Among juvenile arrestees (ages 9–18), the percentage testing positive for cocaine remained almost unchanged over the 1995–1998 time period at about 4 percent, but dropped to 2.5 percent in 1999.

Production

About 55 percent of the cocaine produced in South America is smuggled into the United States through Mexico. Colombians continue to control the worldwide supply of cocaine but there are indications that Mexican DTOs may be attempting to process cocaine base into cocaine hydrochloride. In May 1999, Mexican authorities intercepted a shipment of cocaine base in Mexicali and in December 1999, U.S. and Mexican authorities found a laboratory with equipment and chemicals used in the production of cocaine hydrochloride. Also, packaging and markings on bundles of cocaine seized along the Southwest Border indicate that the cocaine may have been packaged in Mexico.

Transportation

Most of the cocaine smuggled into the United States at the Southwest Border is transported overland through Central America and Mexico. Large cocaine shipments are brought to staging areas along the California–Mexico border by various modes of transportation, the most common being tractor-trailers, trucks, buses, and railcars. The shipments are usually brought to consolidation points along the border where they are divided into smaller quantities in preparation for transport into the United States. According to the Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), the average shipment seized in the first quarter of FY1999 was 36.89 pounds but during the same period in FY2000, the weight of the average shipment rose to 44.9 pounds. However, DEA reports that the average shipment seized at the North San Diego checkpoint weighed 60 to 90 pounds.

Cocaine is usually smuggled into the United States through POEs, but seizures are also made between the POEs. Traffickers use a variety of means including cars, trucks, recreational vehicles, tractor-trailers, and couriers to move their product into Southern California. Once the drugs have been smuggled across the border, they may be left at predetermined locations to be picked up by different couriers or drivers and taken to their final destinations or to consolidation points for transshipment to other parts of the country. Intelligence indicates that most of the cocaine being smuggled into Southern California is destined for the Los Angeles area. In March 2000, Border Patrol agents intercepted a car carrying 44 pounds of cocaine at a checkpoint on Interstate 5 north of San Diego. The cocaine had been concealed behind a false dashboard. Two females, both Mexican nationals from Sinaloa, were arrested. The cocaine was most likely destined for Los Angeles. According to the DEA San Diego Field Division, most bulk cocaine seizures are effected by the California Highway Patrol during routine traffic stops.

Cocaine may also be smuggled in railcars coming into the United States from Mexico. In 1997, law enforcement in New Jersey seized 2,175.8 pounds of cocaine that had been hidden inside a transformer. The transformer had been shipped from Mexico, via San Antonio, on a railroad flatcar.

Smugglers are increasingly using private aircraft, according to the Customs Service AMICC. In 1999, the AMICC reported 9 suspect aircraft near the border in the Tecate and Jacuma areas of San Diego and Imperial Counties, 2 flyers within 25 miles of the border, and 11 low flyers. AMICC also reported 245 suspect aircraft targets in Baja California Norte—double the number detected in 1998. In 1999, total suspect air activity along the Southwest Border included 29 suspect border crossers, 26 radar suspects, 74 low flyers, and 1,138 suspect targets in Mexico. Electronic and

Although the AMICC does not mention cocaine specifically, Amado Carrillo-Fuentes, once known as the “lord of the skies,” used air transport to move multiton quantities of cocaine to the U.S.–Mexico border.

human intelligence suggest that traffickers may be returning to airborne smuggling as a means of expediting drug shipments and reducing costs. Air transport is also viewed as a more secure method of smuggling. Cocaine smugglers also use maritime transportation to access the San Diego County area. Various intelligence indicators show that maritime smuggling in the eastern Pacific off the coasts of Mexico and San Diego is also increasing. In 1999, the San Diego Maritime Task Force seized 2,976 pounds of cocaine; this compares to no cocaine seized in 1998.

Another factor that impacts the San Diego area is the increase in mothership operations off the Mexican coast. In August 1999, the Mexican Navy seized 8.6 tons of cocaine from a fishing vessel off the coast of Michoacan; the crew was from Ensenada, Baja California Norte, the possible destination of the cocaine shipment. Authorities seized more than 31 tons (63,000 pounds) of cocaine in the Eastern Pacific in FY1999. In the first 6 months of FY2000, the Coast Guard seized 24 tons of cocaine.

Distribution

Most of the cocaine smuggled into the area is transshipped to Los Angeles for transport to other cities across the country. However, wholesale distribution of powdered cocaine in the San Diego–Imperial County area is usually controlled by Mexican DTOs. At the retail level, crack cocaine is seen more often than powdered cocaine. African-American street gangs usually control the street-level distribution of crack cocaine.

Law enforcement agencies, responding to a February 2000 NIN survey, identified 139 drug trafficking organizations operating in the NIN Southern California and Mexico Border Region. This compared to 106 in July 1999, 92 in January 1998, and 119 in July 1997. Of the 106 identified in the 1999 survey, 52 were linked to cocaine; in the February 2000 survey, 78 were associated with cocaine. NIN cautions that these figures may vary with the number of agencies responding.

Wholesale

Tijuana and Mexicali are considered source cities for cocaine smuggled into the region. The Arellano-Felix Organization, based in Baja California Norte, and the Miguel Angel Caro-Quintero Organization based in Sonora, Chihuahua, and Sinaloa, are major polydrug organizations responsible for smuggling ton quantities of cocaine into Southern California. Cocaine, like other drugs, is distributed through a layered network. Mexican DTOs deal with middlemen who work with known dealers—from gangs to loosely knit cells to individuals—who distribute cocaine at the street level. This system insulates major drug traffickers from law enforcement reaction to street-level criminal activity.

In a recent law enforcement action, federal agents arrested a San Diego resident who operated a widespread cocaine and marijuana trafficking network. The network extended from San Diego and El Paso to Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Boston, Nashville, and Atlanta. The organization was responsible for the transportation and distribution of multiton quantities of cocaine and marijuana. The drugs were brought into San Diego and El Paso from Mexico and then sent to Chicago via cars, tractor-trailers, and piggyback trains.[1] From Chicago the drugs were sent on to the other cities.

Another case involved the arrest of 42 members of the Mongols Motorcycle Club in Southern

1. Commercial cargo trailers are “piggybacked” or transported on train cars to a distribution point where they are offloaded. These trailers will then be picked up by a commercial tractor and driven to the final destination.

California who were involved in the distribution of multikilograms of cocaine. Authorities seized the cocaine, $21,000 in cash, and more than 70 firearms including two machine guns and one shotgun. The group was also involved in motorcycle theft. The Mongols Motorcycle Club has chapters in San Diego, Tijuana, and 19 other locations.

Retail

Independent dealers, criminal groups, and street gangs that include Colombians, Mexicans, Caucasians, and African Americans distribute cocaine at the street level. African American, Jamaican, and Dominican criminal groups dominate retail sales of powdered and crack cocaine in San Diego. In Imperial County, cocaine is distributed by African-American gangs such as the Harlem-30s Crips. According to the San Diego Sheriff's Department, local street-level distributors convert 80 percent of the cocaine available in the area into crack. The San Diego County Sheriff's Department also reports that some of the groups involved in cocaine distribution are connected to the Arellano-Felix Organization.

The Gangster Disciples gang is becoming more active in northern San Diego County. It is apparently trying to unite African-American gangs that operate in areas such as Oceanside and San Marcos under its control. These gangs, usually Crips, have an estimated membership of 300. According to law enforcement sources, the Gangster Disciples gang has been in the area about 1¾ years. Law enforcement has identified approximately 80 members of the gang and estimates its numbers at 200 to 250. The Gangster Disciples gang deals almost exclusively in powdered and crack cocaine, and it taxes other dealers who distribute drugs in areas under its control. The gang is also known to deal in weapons.

Black Gangster Disciple Nation

A group of African-American gangs in the Englewood area of Chicago formed the Black Gangster Disciple Nation gang in the late 1960s. It is primarily engaged in street-level distribution of narcotics and is known to use extortion against rival drug dealers. The Black Gangster Disciple Nation has since extended its membership and influence to a number of other cities and states including California.

Marijuana

Marijuana is the most prevalent drug in San Diego and Imperial Counties and Mexican DTOs continue to be the principal suppliers. According to 1999 statistics, authorities seized more marijuana than any other drug at the Southwest Border. A sampling of USCS figures for 2000 shows that marijuana continues to be the most frequently smuggled drug at California POEs. The amount of marijuana seized at or within 150 miles of the border rose 238 percent between 1995 and 1999. (See Table 6 on page 27.)

In August 1999, Mexican authorities seized 10 tons of marijuana believed to be destined for San Diego. San Diego and Imperial Counties are principal transshipment points for Mexican-produced marijuana destined for areas throughout the country.

Most of the marijuana available in San Diego and Imperial Counties is produced in Mexico, but it is also cultivated locally. In 1999, authorities seized almost 240,000 pounds of marijuana that had been cultivated on public lands in Central and Southern California. High quality marijuana from Canada (BC Bud) is also available in the district. In the San Diego–Imperial County area, Mexican-produced marijuana sells for $310 to $600 per pound; BC Bud sells for $4,000. Mexican marijuana distributors in Los Angeles may be buying BC Bud, mixing it with Mexican-produced marijuana, and marketing it as BC Bud.

According to a recent report from NIN, there are approximately 91 drug organizations trafficking marijuana in the Southern California and Mexico Border Region. In 1999, local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies participated in 902 narcotic enforcement actions (search warrants, arrest warrants, and waiver searches) involving marijuana and 1,590 polydrug events, some of which probably included marijuana. A number of the polydrug distributors deal in marijuana, methamphetamine, and heroin, the three major drugs trafficked by Mexican DTOs.

BC Bud is cultivated mainly in British Columbia and is growing in popularity because of its higher (about 25 percent) THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) content. This compares to THC levels of 4 to 6 percent in Mexican-produced marijuana. BC Bud sells for $1,500–$2,000 per pound in Vancouver, British Columbia, $4,000 per pound in Portland, and $6,000 per pound in Los Angeles. Outlaw motorcycle gangs and Vietnamese criminal organizations control marijuana production in British Columbia. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police estimates that there are 8,000 indoor marijuana grows on the lower mainland of British Columbia.

USCS seizures made in 2000 show that marijuana continues to be one of the most frequently smuggled drugs at California POEs. A number of significant marijuana seizures were reported during June 2000 including two at Tecate (927 lb and 1,495 lb), two at San Ysidro (1,000 lb and 215 lb) and one each at Otay Mesa (822 lb) and Calexico (452 lb).

NDIC

U.S. Customs seized 192 pounds of marijuana packed in the engine compartment of a pickup truck in April 2000 at the San Ysidro port of entry.

Table 6. Arrival Zone Seizures California–Mexico Border

Drug	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Change from 1995 to 1999 (Percent)
Marijuana	**56,737**	**169,287**	**138,662**	**186,941**	**191,514**	**238**
Cocaine	16,041	12,028	5,577	7,430	7,117	-56
Heroin	81	106	87	127	119	47
Methamphetamine	N/A	N/A	382	421	696	82

Source: DEA, El Paso Intelligence Center, *Arrival Zone Seizures*, updated 23 February 2000.

Abuse

Treatment admissions for marijuana/hashish abuse in San Diego and Imperial Counties registered the highest increase of any drug from FY1998 to FY1999: San Diego County admissions rose 84 percent (from 1,035 to 1,906) and Imperial County admissions rose 18 percent (from 150 to 178). The majority of those seeking treatment were under 18 years of age, male, and Caucasian. Hispanics made up the second largest group, and African Americans the third. Many experts consider marijuana to be a gateway drug and express concern that increased marijuana use will lead to the abuse of more harmful illicit substances.

A recent medical study suggests that middle-age and older marijuana smokers may be at increased risk for a heart attack within the first hour of use. Another study indicates that smoking marijuana may increase the risk of lung cancer. Experiments demonstrate that THC reduces the body's ability to produce cytokines, immune suppressors that are known to limit tumor growth. The main cause for concern is that marijuana deposits a large amount of tar in the respiratory tract.

The most recent data from the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs indicate that the number of treatment admissions for marijuana in San Diego and Imperial Counties increased again in FY2000. The number of those seeking treatment for marijuana use rose from 2,084 in FY1999 to 2,355 in FY2000, an increase of 13 percent. Despite the sizable increase, marijuana admissions still rank well below those for heroin (5,224) and methamphetamine (4,226).

Availability

Marijuana is the most widely available illicit substance in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Federal, state, and local law enforcement classify it as the most prevalent drug encountered in the area by far. The San Diego Sheriff's Department and the Chula Vista Police Department identify marijuana availability as high and the threat as increasing. More marijuana is seized on California's southern

border than any other drug. Between 1996 and 1999, the amount of marijuana seized increased 17 percent. Seizures of marijuana along the entire length of the Southwest Border have increased each year as well—from 423.4 metric tons in 1996 to 993.7 metric tons in 1999. However, recent data from CBAG indicates that seizures for the first six months of 2000 have remained about the same as the corresponding period in 1999. NIN reports that the price of marijuana has decreased from $400–$600 per pound in 1999 to about $310 per pound in 2000, an indication that supply may be outstripping demand. The retail price of 1 gram or less is $5, of 1 to 3 grams $10, and of 7 grams (1/4 ounce) $50 to $55.

Table 7. Marijuana Prices

	DEA–9/30/99	NIN–2000
Ounce	**$100–$400**	**$50–$75**
Kilogram		**$500–$1,000**
Pound (Mexican under 10% THC)	**$300–$600**	**$300–$400**
Pound (BC Bud 25% THC)		**$4,000**

Source: Narcotic Information Network, *San Diego-Imperial County Street Drug Price List*, March 2000.

Violence

While the abusers are generally characterized as nonviolent, marijuana trafficking generates violence. Investigations of DTOs and other criminal organizations identify their involvement in extortion, murder, contract killing, and intimidation as a part of doing business. During the commission of the crime of smuggling, violence is often directed at law enforcement. For example, the driver of a vehicle containing 2,800 pounds of marijuana attempted to run down a U.S. Customs agent at the San Ysidro POE in March 2000; the Customs agent was forced to shoot the driver, who died at the scene.

Production

Domestic production may account for upwards of 50 percent of the marijuana consumed in the United States. Nationwide, the cannabis growing states of California, Hawaii, Kentucky, and Tennessee produce so much marijuana that the United States now exports marijuana to Canada.

The DEA San Diego Field Division reports an increase in the number of smaller outdoor grow sites in the mountainous areas of San Diego County as well as of indoor grows. Some growers are cultivating cannabis on public lands. The U. S. Forest Service reports that seizures in the Cleveland, San Bernardino, and Angeles National Forests increased over 300 percent in the last 3-year period. The Forest Service seized 49,126 pounds of cannabis in 1997 and 237,329 pounds in 1999 in the three areas.

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

Hydroponic and cloning techniques allow marijuana growers to harvest crops with a higher THC content three to four times a year. Approximately 6,600 plants were seized in the San Diego area in the last quarter of FY1999. Aeroponics is another relatively new method used in the cultivation of cannabis. Cannabis plants are suspended in the air by attaching the stems to a structure. Sprayers, similar to those found in the produce departments of supermarkets, are used to spray nutrients

on the roots. Timers are used to turn the sprayers on and off at set intervals.

Growers may automate indoor cannabis cultivation using computers and multitask controllers. The operation of computers and controllers from a remote location enables cannabis growers to distance themselves from the growing operation. Electronically controlled cannabis operations also require less manpower during the growing phase. Computers can be used to monitor development of the plants and environmental factors such as light, water, and temperature. Computers can also be used to maintain cultivation records and store customer information. Multitask automatic controllers are powered by electricity and are usually fully programmable, using timers and sensors to monitor and control the grow environment. Controllers have the advantage of being more economical and easier to use than computers. Controllers that can be programmed require minimum oversight and computers can be accessed from a separate site.

County law enforcement reports that Caucasians and illegal aliens are responsible for virtually all of the outdoor cannabis grows but that only Caucasians are responsible for the indoor grows encountered. The same source further reports that supercropping techniques are being used in indoor cannabis cultivation.

Subsequent to an investigation in Los Angeles, authorities in San Ysidro, California, discovered an indoor cannabis operation in an underground room. The room was located beneath a residence; it was accessed by a trapdoor located in a bedroom closet.

In April 2000, federal agents arrested two men who were operating a large, sophisticated indoor cannabis growing operation in Alpine, located on I–8 east of San Diego near the Cleveland National Forest. Agents seized 750 marijuana plants and thousands of dollars' worth of growing equipment. According to the report, one of the subjects was alleged to have been involved in major cannabis growing operations in Florida in the 1990s, and federal agents traced him to the San Diego area.

Transportation

The flow of marijuana over the California–Mexico border continues at a vigorous pace and Mexican traffickers are the principal sources of supply for marijuana. Large quantities of marijuana are transported overland through Mexico to the California–Mexico border. The transporters use tractor-trailers and various other vehicles to move the marijuana over Mexico's highways and secondary roads to the Southwest Border. In April 2000, Mexican Federal Judicial Police seized 7.5 metric tons of marijuana in a truck near Ensenada. The truck was traveling from La Paz to the border city of Tijuana.

Most marijuana is smuggled overland. The principal land corridors from Baja California into Southern California continue to be through and between California POEs. Marijuana is smuggled in commercial and private vehicles and by backpackers. According to USCS, most marijuana smugglers use the San Ysidro POE, followed by Calexico and Otay Mesa. In May 2000, USCS reported several large seizures of marijuana at POEs. At Otay Mesa, Customs seized 6,855 pounds of marijuana that had been hidden inside detergent boxes. At the Tecate POE, Customs seized two large shipments, of 6,939 pounds and 4,454 pounds, which had been hidden inside the front walls of commercial tractor-trailers. Other large shipments have been commingled with legitimate cargo such as wood chips and produce. Multi-hundred-pound shipments of marijuana have been seized from personal vehicles where they were hidden in various compartments and places such as quarter panels and spare tires. They may also be hidden in boxes of clothing. During the first quarter of 2000, USCS seized over 92,000 pounds of marijuana at California POEs.

CBAG reports that marijuana smuggling organizations are moving their operations east of Otay Mountain and the majority of seizures are being made west of the Tecate POE. The Tierra Del Sol in East San Diego is considered a preferred smuggling area. Backpackers from Mexico can walk across the border, leave the marijuana at a predetermined drop site, and return to Mexico. Pickup vehicles have quick access to Highway 94, which connects to Interstate 8. Border Patrol agents conducted the largest seizure reported for the San Diego area in 1999 at Tierra Del Sol, where they confiscated 4,902 pounds of marijuana. Since there is a border fence in the area, agents believe the smugglers used a specially equipped vehicle to place a ramp up and over the fence, allowing a vehicle to drive over the fence.

According to the DEA San Diego Field Division, most marijuana seizures are made in the DEA Imperial County Resident Office area of responsibility. DEA attributes this to long established smuggling activities along the Imperial County–Baja California Norte border. The Ocotillo area in western Imperial County is also considered a preferred area for marijuana smuggling. Backpacking is a commonly used method for smuggling marijuana into this area. The Imperial County Narcotics Task Force reports that backpackers may transit the desert in the eastern part of the county and deposit the marijuana at predetermined drop sites. Backpackers transport approximately 3 to 5 tons of marijuana into the region quarterly, and backpacking activity accounts for 30 to 40 percent of all the marijuana seizures made by DEA Imperial County Resident Office. These seizures are usually due to referrals from the USBP. According to a recent news report, the amount of marijuana backpackers carry varies with the distance traveled: 50 to 60 pounds for a few miles but 30 to 40 pounds for longer distances. DEA in Imperial County reports that recently a preferred method for moving marijuana has been to transport bulk shipments unconcealed in the rear of sport utility vehicles or concealed in tractor-trailers hauling hay.

Marijuana smugglers also have access to San Diego County through its coastal areas. Smugglers use a wide variety of private and commercial vessels including inflatable speedboats and fishing boats to transport marijuana. In 1999, the Maritime Task Force seized over 7,600 pounds of marijuana on or near the coast of San Diego.

Mexican DTOs are also known to use the rail system to transport large quantities of marijuana through Mexico. Between 1995 and 1996, Mexican authorities seized over 40 metric tons of marijuana from railcars. In one instance, 4.7 metric tons were found in the cargo area of a passenger train. In 1997, the U.S. Border Patrol seized over 2 metric tons of marijuana from a boxcar that had been transported to the United States from Mexico. The marijuana was hidden in a false compartment.

Distribution

Mexico-based DTOs are the primary sources of marijuana encountered in the San Diego–Imperial County area. The region is both a destination and a transshipment point for Mexican marijuana. Mexican DTOs working through middlemen control the wholesale distribution of marijuana in the two-county area. Jamaican drug trafficking groups also have a major role in marijuana trafficking at the wholesale level. Intelligence reporting indicates that Jamaican drug trafficking groups use the San Diego area as both a consolidation and a transshipment point for marijuana to be shipped to the East Coast. At the retail level, marijuana is distributed by various criminal groups, individuals, and street gangs. Law enforcement agencies responding to a survey by NIN identified 91 organizations involved in the transportation or distribution of marijuana in the area on both sides of the California–Mexico border.

Wholesale

While Mexican DTOs—especially the Arellano-Felix Organization—are the primary sources of supply, the San Diego Sheriff's Department reports that the most notable change in the trafficking of marijuana is the increased involvement of Jamaican groups in transportation and distribution at the wholesale level. Jamaican DTOs control a large marijuana distribution network in San Diego. Jamaican DTOs are using San Diego as a transshipment point for marijuana destined for eastern and midwestern U.S. cities. A recent report suggests that Puerto Rican trafficking groups are also involved in the transshipment of marijuana from San Diego to other U.S. locations.

CBAG reports that marijuana is the most commonly encountered drug shipped by mail. An estimated 80 percent of the packages seized have been linked directly to Jamaican crime groups. Intelligence indicates that Jamaican DTOs may be consolidating marijuana in the San Diego area in preparation for transporting large shipments east using tractor-trailers, motor homes, and buses. Law enforcement reporting indicates that Jamaican DTOs purchase Mexican marijuana in the San Diego area for as little as $300 per pound and sell it on the East Coast for $1,000 to $1,350 per pound.

Drug traffickers appear to be managing their risk by moving more, but smaller, shipments of drugs and currency (shotgunning). For example, in 1999, seizures of less than 100 pounds accounted for 75 percent of the number and 50 percent of the weight of marijuana seizures at the POEs. DEA reports that the size and amount of drug and currency shipments seized from couriers on airline flights to and from San Diego decreased. They further reported that the average amount of currency seized by their Commercial Interdiction Team at various mail distribution centers averaged between $10,000 and $20,000.

Other marijuana wholesalers identified by DEA were Puerto Rican criminal groups. Their modus operandi appeared to be a form of shotgunning. In the first 6 months of 1999, male couriers traveled from Puerto Rico to San Diego with a few thousand dollars to purchase 30- to 50-pound lots of marijuana. They intended to transport the marijuana back to Puerto Rico.

Retail

Federal, state, and local law enforcement sources report that the local marijuana trade is heavily influenced by the Arellano-Felix Organization. The San Diego Sheriff's Department and the Chula Vista Police Department report that the individuals and groups distributing marijuana in the area include independent dealers, street gangs, and Caucasian, Jamaican, and Mexican criminal groups. Of these, Mexican groups were identified as dominant. The San Diego County Drug Task Force reports that distributors of marijuana consist of individuals, street gangs, and loosely knit, predominately Hispanic cells or groups which, for the most part, are involved in the sale of multiple drugs.

One example of polydrug distribution involving marijuana occurred in March 2000. Escondido police and the DEA Mobile Enforcement Team arrested 40 suspects that included Westside Gang members and other drug dealers. Law enforcement investigations showed that the gangs were becoming more organized in their drug dealing and that more of the drugs were coming from Mexico. During the arrests, authorities seized marijuana, methamphetamine, and heroin. Allegedly the subjects purchased pound quantities of drugs and repackaged them into ounce quantities.

As noted earlier in this report, La Eme controls a large portion of drug distribution in the area through the use of street gangs and the imposition of taxes on other dealers. A case that

highlights this situation culminated in April 2000 when a member of La Eme was found guilty of extortion for demanding payments from drug suppliers. The subject not only demanded thousands of dollars from a drug dealer, he also assaulted him and took his vehicle as partial payment for “taxes” owed.

In some cases, drug dealers do not fit the stereotype. In Desert Hot Springs, located in northwestern Imperial County, police arrested a 70-year-old woman for distribution of marijuana and crack cocaine within 1,000 feet of a school. Police seized about $1,000 worth of crack cocaine and $40 worth of marijuana.

Authorities also report that, prior to being shipped to various destinations throughout the country, marijuana is placed in area stash houses. An example of this occurred in June 2000, when law enforcement in City Heights found 465 pounds of marijuana inside a residence. Officers report that marijuana was stored at the residence and then sent elsewhere for distribution.

Other Dangerous Drugs

The other dangerous drugs category comprises many drugs including those classified as "club drugs." The data presented here focus on various drugs, in order of significance, that present the biggest threat to the District of Southern California.

Numerous police departments and individuals who monitor drug use reported alarming increases in the popularity of club drugs. The term club drug describes various drugs used by young adults and teens at all night dance parties called raves or trances. These drugs are also encountered at other places of entertainment such as dance clubs and bars. Research sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has shown that club drugs may cause serious health problems and, in combination with alcohol, can be even more dangerous. In some cases, abuse of club drugs may cause death. Some of the drugs referred to as club drugs are ketamine, MDMA, GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), and LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide). These drugs run the gamut from stimulants to sedatives to hallucinogens.

NIDA reports that some club drugs have been used to commit sexual assaults. Because they are colorless, tasteless, and odorless, some club drugs can be added to the beverages of unsuspecting potential victims. After ingesting, victims are incapacitated and, in some cases, may experience "anterograde amnesia." In other words, the victims of sexual assaults may not remember what happened to them while they were under the influence of the drug. Both Rohypnol and GHB have been linked to sexual assaults across the country. Another drug that is a growing concern is clonazepam. Clonazepam is a Rohypnol-type drug that is being used in sexual assaults.

The San Diego Sheriff's Department reports that the threat from club drugs such as ketamine, MDMA, GHB, and Rohypnol is moderate but increasing and that the use of these drugs among young adults and teens is growing. Ketamine and GHB are of particular concern. GHB is being produced in the area, and ketamine and clonazepam incidents have increased.

Information from the Chula Vista Police Department regarding club drugs concurs with San Diego Sheriff's Department reports. There has been a heavy influx of these drugs into the region. According to the Chula Vista Police Department, club drugs are more prevalent in the county than within the city. They also report occurrences of Rohypnol use in schools. Most of the Rohypnol encountered in the region is smuggled from Mexico.

Clonazepam

Clonazepam is similar in pharmacology to benzodiazepine and diazepine. It is a prescription drug used as an anticonvulsant. Some adverse effects of clonazepam use include central nervous system depression, alterations in behavior such as aggressiveness, agitation, euphoria, forgetfulness, confusion, and ataxia (inability to coordinate muscles). Clonazepam is marketed in the United States as Klonopin and in Mexico as Rivotril. Clonazepam 0.5-milligram tablets are orange with Rivotril or Roche stamped on them. The 2-milligram tablets are white with Roche engraved on one side with cross-scoring on the other side.

Both the San Diego and the Chula Vista Police Departments report an increase in the abuse of clonazepam. The San Diego Police Department reports that the drug is being seized at junior and senior high schools. Users claim that it produces a high without the smoke and red eyes associated with marijuana and is easier to conceal. Heroin addicts choose Klonopin when they cannot afford heroin. Clonazepam is used to enhance the effects of heroin and other opiates.

Clonazepam is also being used to replicate the effects of Rohypnol, a date rape drug. According to anecdotal information, adults and teens are buying clonazepam in Mexico and bringing it into the United States. It may be sold for as little as a dollar a pill and is being called "the dollar date." Texas may be experiencing a similar problem. According to a 1999 report from the Texas Commission of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, Mexican criminal groups are pushing clonazepam as a replacement for Rohypnol.

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- The San Diego City Council took the unusual step of creating an emergency law that makes it illegal to possess the drug clonazepam without a prescription. The countywide Narcotics Task Force said that the use of the drug is becoming more prevalent among youths and is being used for date rape. Clonazepam was used during the sexual assault of two women in two documented cases. Moreover, authorities suspect the drug is being used by sexual predators more frequently. The pills cost about 25 cents each in Mexico and are resold for about $1 each.

  Source: *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 18 April 2000.

- In 1999, 354 rapes were reported in San Diego, 70 percent involving victims under the influence of alcohol or some other drug.

  Source: *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 15 April 2000.

Ketamine

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

At high doses, ketamine can cause delirium, amnesia, impaired motor function, high blood pressure, depression, and potentially fatal respiratory problems. Low-dose intoxication from ketamine results in impaired attention, learning ability, and memory. Short-term use of ketamine causes hallucinations; its major effect is dissociation, which includes out-of-body and near-death experiences. Ketamine gained popularity among abusers in the 1980s when it was discovered that large doses caused reactions similar to those experienced with PCP. Ketamine abusers in the United States and the United Kingdom have reported incidents similar to bad LSD trips. While under the influence of the drug, they may believe they can fly or may attempt to get out of moving vehicles. The San Diego Sheriff's Department reports an increase in the number of investigations involving ketamine.

Ketamine use is also increasing among some young people in Mexico. A recent report stated that ketamine was the drug of choice among high school students in Monterrey, Mexico. Monterrey is located in the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon, which borders southeast Texas. A bottle of ketamine sells for 155 pesos or US $16.

Intelligence reporting indicates that most of the ketamine found in San Diego and Imperial Counties is smuggled across the border from Mexico. The DEA Imperial County Resident Office has seen an increase in ketamine, which has become common at rave parties. San Diego County law enforcement recently raided a dance club and arrested 19 individuals, 4 of whom were dealing ketamine.

In March 2000, U.S. Customs seized 29 bottles of ketamine at the San Ysidro POE. The drug was

wrapped in sandwich bags and duct tape and concealed inside the quarter panels of an automobile. In April 2000, Customs seized three shipments of ketamine that would have provided 162,400 hits. The shipments totaled 1,624 10-milliliter bottles, each bottle containing 10 hits (1 ml each). Two of the shipments had been hidden inside vehicle speaker boxes and one shipment included steroids. Another shipment, of 240 bottles packed in three children's puzzle boxes, was seized from two New Jersey men. The men had prepared mailing labels so that the ketamine could be shipped to New Jersey through a parcel service. The current price of ketamine is listed as $30–$45 per dose (0.02 grams) compared to $20–$25 in 1999.

GHB

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

The DEA San Diego Field Division reports an increase in GHB-related activity. The Field Division seized three GHB laboratories in 1999 and reports that the Parcel Interdiction Team at San Diego International Airport seized numerous GHB parcels destined for other parts of the country. The DEA San Diego Integrated Narcotics Task Force reports that two GHB laboratories have been seized so far in 2000. The San Diego Police Department reports that the GHB in powder form has been seen on the street. The most recent price quoted for GHB is $10 for 6 ounces. An episode demonstrating the risk involving GHB use occurred in March 2000 when a 22-year-old woman died from a drug overdose. She had attended a party in Oceanside, California, where she ingested an unknown substance. The officers involved in a follow-up investigation focused on GHB and found chemicals they believe were used to produce the drug.

GBL, a List I chemical used in the production of GHB, was not mentioned in reports but is a potential problem. When taken orally, GBL is converted into GHB in the body. On January 21, 1999, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a warning about food supplement products containing GBL and requested that producers recall all products containing the additive. According to a January 2000 report, GBL has been implicated in at least six deaths nationwide. GBL is widely sold as both a powder and a liquid at gyms, fitness centers, and some health food stores. In February 2000, authorities in Phoenix, Arizona, arrested a man who was selling GBL through the Internet. The GBL was shipped to locations around the country including San Diego.

Another chemical related to GHB is butanediol (1,4-butanediol). It is a precursor to GHB and is used in the production of plastics and adhesives. Butanediol is a central nervous system depressant, which is converted into GHB in the body. Teens often carry the butanediol in small containers like mini-shampoo bottles. A bottle holds 4 doses of 1/2 teaspoon each and sells for 75 cents to $5. One dose has the same effect as alcohol at a blood level of 0.10 or 0.12.

In June 2000, a 17-year-old high school student in Bakersfield, California, overdosed on butanediol after he drank water into which he had mixed a dose of the drug. He blacked out and was

taken to a hospital. His heart rate dropped to 30 beats per minute and his breathing to 6 to 8 times a minute. (A normal heart rate is 75 to 100 beats per minute while normal respiration is 16 to 20 per minute.) According to paramedics, drugs normally used to jump-start the heart after an overdose of narcotics such as heroin cannot counteract the effects of GHB or butanediol; paramedics can only provide an airway, do cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and maintain basic life functions until the drug wears off. The paramedics also reported that GHB, GBL, and butanediol are difficult to trace because they leave the body so quickly.

MDMA

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

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

MDMA is available in both San Diego and Imperial Counties. Law enforcement in San Diego County raided a nightclub in May 2000 and arrested 19 individuals. Before the raid, undercover officers had purchased large amounts of MDMA inside the club. The current wholesale price for MDMA is $20–$25 per dose and $10 per pill, according to NIN.

According to DEA estimates, about 80 percent of the MDMA consumed worldwide is produced in clandestine laboratories in the Netherlands and Belgium. The DEA further reports that 95 percent of the MDMA that is available in the Los Angeles area is supplied by sources in European countries. Worldwide, Israeli criminals of Russian descent dominate distribution of MDMA but current information indicates that the Russian Mafia is also involved in the trafficking of the drug.

> Approximately 23 kilograms of MDMA tablets were seized at the Mexico City International Airport. Two persons were detained after the drug was found in their luggage, an 18-year-old Dutch woman and a 24-year-old Mexican man. The estimated value of the drug was reported at $746,800.
>
> Source: www.el-universal.com.mx, 21 August 2000.

Some of the MDMA available in Southern California comes from European sources. In an incident in June 1999, USCS agents in San Diego arrested a Mexican citizen who was residing in the United States on suspicion of attempting to buy 11,600 MDMA tablets. Authorities also arrested two associates of the Mexican citizen, a male and a female, who attempted to bring the tablets into the United States from the Netherlands via the Minneapolis International Airport. The drugs, valued at $500,000, were found strapped to the ankles of the two subjects.

Law enforcement in San Diego and Imperial Counties reports that some MDMA is also being smuggled into the area from Mexico. Intelligence reporting indicates that there has been some involvement by Mexican criminal organizations in the trafficking of MDMA from Europe but the extent of their involvement is unknown. However, with the rising popularity of MDMA, Mexican criminal involvement may increase.

Rohypnol

Rohypnol (flunitrazepam) also called roofies, rophies, Roche, and the forget-me pill belongs to a class of drugs known as benzodiazapines (Valium, Halcion, Xanax, Versed). Rohyphol is not approved for prescription use in the United States. Rohypnol produces sedative–hypnotic effects including muscle relaxation and amnesia and can also cause physiological and psychological dependence. Poison control centers in Miami report an increase in cases of withdrawal seizures among people using Rohypnol.

Until 1998, Rohypnol was colorless and dissolved quickly in liquid. In 1998, the manufacturer changed the formula, adding blue dye and making it more difficult to dissolve so that intended victims of sexual assault could more easily detect the drug in a drink. However, it has been noted that while this blue dye would be discernible in transparent containers it may not be detectable in opaque or metal containers. It has been suggested that the drug should also be made bitter to the taste.

LSD

LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), also known as acid, boomers, and yellow sunshines, is a hallucinogen that induces abnormalities in sensory perceptions. The effects of LSD are unpredictable depending on the amount taken, the environment in which it is used, and the user's personality, mood, and expectations. Users may feel the effects for 30 to 90 minutes. The physical effects include dilated pupils, higher body temperature, increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, dry mouth, and tremors. LSD users report numbness, weakness, or trembling, and nausea is common. Two long-term disorders associated with LSD are persistent psychosis and hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (flashbacks). LSD is typically taken orally; it is sold in tablet, capsule, and liquid form, and in pieces of paper that have absorbed the drug. Historically, LSD has been produced in Northern California.

LSD is available in the area and law enforcement in San Diego County reports an increase in the number of investigations involving the drug. In one recent case, 64.6 grams of LSD were seized from two females traveling on one-way tickets from San Diego to Oakland, California; they were carrying the drug in their pants' pockets.

The Chula Vista Police Department has had only minor contacts with LSD and has not identified any mainstream LSD dealing. Respondents to a February 2000 NIN survey identified eight organizations that are involved in the trafficking of drugs such as PCP and LSD in the Southern California area.

PCP

PCP (phencyclidine) was originally developed as an intravenous anesthetic. Use of PCP in humans was discontinued in 1965 because it was found that patients became agitated, delusional,

and irrational while recovering from its effects. PCP is now illegally produced in clandestine laboratories and is sold on the street as angel dust, ozone, wack, and rocket fuel.

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

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

Area law enforcement reports that PCP is available in the area. Law enforcement in San Diego reports recent activity involving the drug; however, the Chula Vista Police Department has had only minor contacts with PCP and has not identified any mainstream dealing of the drug. According to NIN, authorities have identified about eight organizations or groups involved in the trafficking of dangerous drugs including PCP.

Khat

Khat is a natural stimulant found in the leaves of the Catha edulis plant, a flowering evergreen native to East Africa. However, the North California HIDTA reported that several grow sites had been located in Alameda and Monterey Counties. Fresh khat leaves are crimson-brown and glossy but become yellow-green and leathery as they age. The fresh leaves contain cathinone and d-methamphetamine; left unrefrigerated for 48 hours, the leaves would contain only cathine, a milder form of cathinone. The cathinone–cathine is ingested by chewing the leaves. Khat was placed on the Schedule I Federal Controlled Substance list in 1993.

In August 1999, Border Patrol agents seized about one-third of a pound of khat at a checkpoint on northbound I–15. The khat was rolled up in newspapers. There were two male occupants in the car, a Canadian citizen who resided in Toronto and a legal resident alien from Los Angeles; both were of Somali origin. According to the report, Customs officials at Los Angeles International Airport often intercept khat smugglers with shipments of up to 100 pounds. The San Diego Police Department reports that they are seeing some khat use among the Ethiopian and Somali populations.

Inhalants

The California Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement issued a warning on “huffing.” Huffing is the sniffing of common household products such as paint, gasoline, and hair spray. Sniffing these

inhalants can introduce toxins into the body causing damage to the liver, lungs, kidneys, brain, and even death. According to a news report, there were five deaths in San Diego in the last 5 years that have been attributed to inhalant abuse; two teenagers died in San Diego County in 1999, one by the method known as "bagging." In another example, 19-year-old was found with a plastic bag over his head and a can of shaving gel. Nationwide, inhalant abusers increased from 300,000 in 1991 to over a million in 1999. The average age of the inhalant abuser is between 12 and 13, although there have been reported cases of 5 year olds "huffing."

Pharmaceuticals

Diversion of prescription drugs is of such concern in San Diego that the San Diego Police Department assigned officers to deal specifically with the problem. There is no significant group or organization involved in the diversion of pharmaceuticals. The main source of diverted pharmaceuticals continues to be unscrupulous doctors and pharmacies. There is also an increase in the use of the Internet to order controlled substances from pharmacies in Mexico and other foreign countries. Pharmaceuticals are also being smuggled across the border from Mexico by individuals and pedestrian couriers.

The most commonly diverted pharmaceuticals are hydrocodone products. Hydrocodone, a narcotic, is a semisynthetic pain reliever. The Community Epidemiology Work Group reports that mentions of narcotic drugs other than heroin have been increasing in many areas. San Diego had one of the highest rates of hydrocodone DAWN emergency department mentions per 100,000 in 1998. The August 2000 DAWN report indicates that, nationally, hydrocodone emergency department mentions increased 63 percent within the last 5 years—from 8,977 in 1995 to 14,639 in 1999. DAWN also reports that in 1998 there were 339 hydrocodone-related deaths nationwide. On the street Vicodin appears to be the preferred brand of hydrocodone; it sells for $3 per pill.

Mexican manufactured Valium is also being diverted for illegal use; it sells for $1 to $3 per pill. According to DEA, Valium manufactured in the United States is almost nonexistent on the street.

The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that the latest trend is mixing prescription drugs with other substances. High school and college students are mixing such drugs as Ritalin (a stimulant) or Valium with alcohol or other drugs. A student at Rollins College in Florida died after ingesting a mixture of Inderal (a heart medication) and two antidepressants. Another concoction killed a student at Trinity College in Connecticut. He died after sniffing a combination of Valium, Xanax (antianxiety medication), an antimigraine medication, and sleeping pills. He had also been drinking alcohol and using heroin.

In November 2000, authorities in Lemon Grove, CA, reported that the body of a man was found inside his pickup truck and his wife's body was found in their apartment, both were apparent victims of drug overdoses. An investigator from the Medical Examiner's office reported that prescription drugs were found throughout the apartment.

Outlook

Methamphetamine-related activity will continue to be the biggest threat facing law enforcement in Southern California. Proximity to methamphetamine sources of supply in Mexico, continued domination of the methamphetamine trade by Mexican DTOs, the ease with which the drug can be produced domestically, and the violence associated with methamphetamine use and trafficking continue to contribute to the methamphetamine threat in Southern California. Barring any major changes, methamphetamine trafficking and abuse will probably continue at current levels as will use of the area by traffickers as both a destination and a transshipment point for the drug.

Heroin trafficking and heroin use continue to be a significant threat in Southern California. While heroin use has not yet reached alarming proportions, the ready availability of high purity Mexican black tar heroin may make it more attractive to adolescents and young adults who are open to drug experimentation. Use of the region as both a destination and a transshipment point by heroin trafficking groups most likely will continue, as will domination of the heroin market by traffickers operating out of Mexico.

Cocaine use and trafficking remain a significant threat in the region. The California–Mexico border will continue to be a major land corridor for cocaine smuggled into the United States from Mexico. The area will continue to be used as a stash and transshipment point. Recent seizure figures indicate a trend toward an increase in maritime smuggling of cocaine. Air activity reported for 1999 indicates that the area may see an increase in the smuggling of cocaine by private aircraft for reasons of security and ease and efficiency of transport. Barring any significant changes in drug flow patterns or level of availability, the supply and price of the drug will most likely remain at or near current levels.

As reflected in drug use indicators, marijuana use among younger users is up. Current seizure figures indicate that large amounts of marijuana will continue to be smuggled across the California–Mexico border. It is unlikely that the marijuana situation will change in the near future. Rather, trafficking organizations operating out of Mexico will continue to dominate the market and will continue to exploit all means and methods to smuggle their product into Southern California.

Club drug use among teens and young adults reflected an upward trend in 1999. Locally, authorities report that activity involving these drugs—particularly ketamine, GHB, and MDMA—is continuing. With the growing popularity of all-night dance parties and the erroneous perception by young people that there is less risk involved with the use of club drugs, this trend will most likely continue. Southern California may also see an increase in the amount of club drugs, particularly ketamine and MDMA, being smuggled into the region from Mexico.

The increase in law enforcement pressure along the California–Mexico border and in San Diego and Imperial Counties will continue to be reflected in the upward trend of drug-related crime statistics.

Intelligence reporting and drug seizure information support previously established drug flow patterns. All major drugs continue to be smuggled from Mexico into Southern California for distribution throughout the country. The Arellano-Felix Organization, operating out of Baja California Norte, is the primary source of drugs smuggled into Southern California. Several questions have arisen as to whether the organization has sold its Tijuana monopoly or scaled back cocaine operations to focus on other major drugs, particularly marijuana. Several top members of the Arellano-Felix Organization have recently been arrested, and reports out of Mexico indicate that the Zambada group is challenging the Arellano-Felix Organization in an effort to gain some influence in the Baja California Norte area. With the arrest of some of the most powerful men of the Arellano-Felix Organization, factions within

and without the organization may vie for control of the Baja area.

Barring any major changes in drug traffickers' methods of doing business or within the Mexican drug trafficking power structures, present drug flow patterns will probably continue. Increasing commercial and private traffic between the United States and Mexico will provide even more opportunities for drug traffickers to move their illicit products across the California–Mexico border.

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Appendix: Drug-Related Financial Crimes

DTOs continue to use the same money laundering methods as in the past. Law enforcement reports indicate that drug proceeds are often smuggled in bulk shipments to Mexico. Some of the means used to move the currency include tractor-trailers, privately owned vehicles, private aircraft, watercraft, parcel delivery services, and courier. Other methods preferred by money launderers in Southern California include the use of seemingly legitimate businesses and wire services. Intelligence reporting indicates that the San Diego area is both a destination and a transshipment point for bulk shipments of currency. EPIC reports that bulk seizures of cash destined for California have decreased but that seizures of cash from individuals at San Diego Airport continue to increase as do seizures from mail service centers in the San Diego area.

Several incidents demonstrate the methods by which money may be moved into the San Diego area. In December 1999, officers seized $78,475 from a male resident of New Orleans. He was traveling by train from New Orleans to San Diego. In March 2000, the DEA Field Division interdiction team seized three boxes containing $699,930. The money was destined for Mexico. California Highway Patrol officers seized $142,329 from a female Mexican national in April 2000. She was traveling southbound on I–5 in San Diego County en route from Los Angeles to Mexicali. The currency was concealed inside the rear seat of the vehicle. In 1999, seizures of currency exceeded $16 million as reported by the California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement, DEA, FBI, USBP, and USCS.

The volume of Reports of International Transportation of Currency or Monetary Instruments (CMIRs) filed at California POEs is an indication that bulk currency smuggled into Mexico may have reentered the U.S. financial system legally. A report from CBAG states that in 1998 CMIR declarations averaged $168,000 and that over $560 million legally entered the United States at the California–Mexico border. Over a period of 11 months in 1999, over $590 million in currency was declared at California POEs.

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