



Hawaii

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Drug Market Analysis

June 2007

U.S. Department of Justice

Preface

This assessment provides a strategic overview of the illicit drug situation in the Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), highlighting significant trends and law enforcement concerns relating to the trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. The report was prepared through detailed analysis

of recent law enforcement reporting, information obtained through interviews with law enforcement and public health officials, and available statistical data. The report is designed to provide policymakers, resource planners, and law enforcement officials with a focused discussion of key drug issues and developments facing the Hawaii HIDTA.

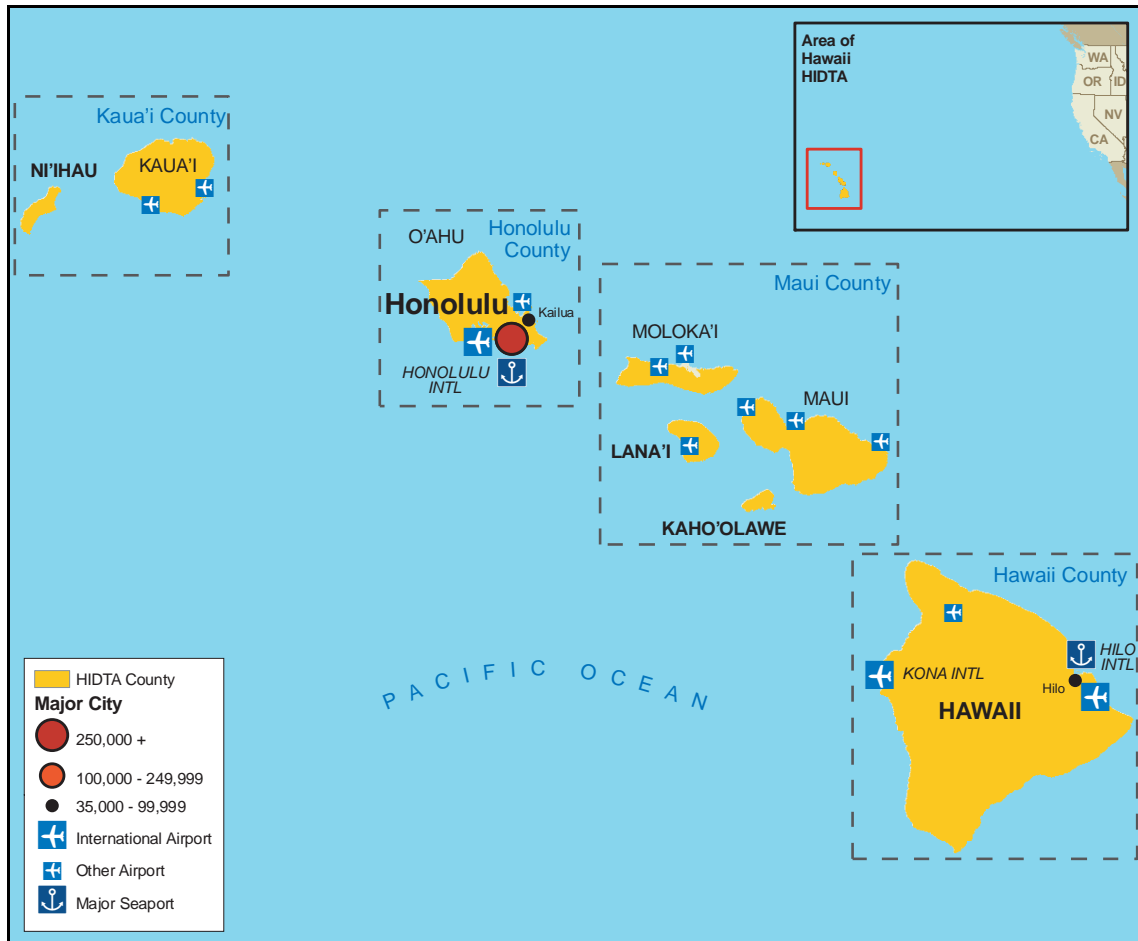


Figure 1. Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

This assessment is an outgrowth of a partnership between the NDIC and HIDTA Program for preparation of annual assessments depicting drug trafficking trends and developments in HIDTA Program areas. The report has been vetted with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.

Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- Decreasing outdoor cannabis cultivation and a corresponding increase in indoor grow operations in Hawaii may signify a shift in marijuana production practices as cultivators begin to move operations indoors in an attempt to evade law enforcement detection and increase profit margins through diversified growing techniques.
- The diversion and abuse of prescription narcotics such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone are increasing in the Hawaii HIDTA region, causing considerable concern among law enforcement personnel and treatment providers.

Drug Trafficking Organizations, Criminal Groups, and Gangs

Drug trafficking organizations are complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs.

Criminal groups operating in the United States are numerous and range from small to moderately sized, loosely knit groups that distribute one or more drugs at the retail and midlevels.

Gangs are defined by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations as groups or associations of three or more persons with a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, the members of which individually or collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

HIDTA Overview

The Hawaii HIDTA was established in 1999 to address the threat posed by illicit drugs in the entire state of Hawaii. The state comprises eight main islands and a 1,500-mile chain of islets that spans over 6,400 square miles in the north central Pacific Ocean approximately 2,500 miles from the mainland United States. The islands have a combined population of approximately 1.2 million people;

most (approximately 70 percent) reside in the city of Honolulu on the island of O'ahu.

Hawaii's geography, diverse demographics, isolated location, reliance on importation, and high volume of tourist and commercial traffic pose significant challenges to law enforcement. International maritime ports and airports in the state and a developed transportation infrastructure provide for the smooth flow of legitimate commerce and also facilitate transshipment and distribution of illicit drugs and drug proceeds to and through Hawaii. Additionally, the diverse, largely transient (tourist) population in the HIDTA region provides a large customer base and a heightened degree of anonymity for the various drug distributors and criminal groups operating in the state.

The city of Honolulu is Hawaii's primary drug market area; the majority of the state's population is concentrated in the city, and further, it is the HIDTA region's principal port of entry (POE) for travelers, mail, and cargo. Consequently, Honolulu is the primary transshipment point for drugs and drug proceeds to, through, and from the state. Hawaii's international airport, international postal facility, and two busiest commercial harbors are also located in Honolulu. Much of what transpires in terms of drug trafficking and abuse in Honolulu drives the drug situation on each of the other populated islands of the state.

Drug Threat Overview

Ice methamphetamine and high-potency marijuana pose the greatest drug threats to the HIDTA region. In fact, methamphetamine and marijuana, respectively, account for the majority of drug treatment admissions in Hawaii, far surpassing treatment admissions for cocaine, heroin, diverted pharmaceuticals, and other dangerous drugs (ODDs). (See [Figure 3 on page 8.](#)) Moreover, the trafficking and abuse of both drugs contribute to the majority of violent crimes and property crimes in the state. Wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine are transported regularly into the HIDTA region by multistate¹ and international drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) for distribution and consumption throughout the state. Most of the marijuana consumed in Hawaii is produced there; however,

1. Multistate is a term designated by the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) to describe an organization that operates in more than one state, which, because of the location of Hawaii, is almost all the organizations.

HIDTA reporting indicates that increasing amounts of high-potency marijuana from California, Oregon, Washington, and Canada are being transported into the HIDTA region by Mexican and Asian DTOs and local criminal groups.

The trafficking and abuse of powder and crack cocaine as well as ODDs and Mexican black heroin are minor and represent low threats to the HIDTA region, while diverted pharmaceuticals represent a growing threat, according to law enforcement officials in the HIDTA region, particularly when compared with other drugs distributed in Hawaii.

Drug Trafficking Organizations

International and multistate DTOs pose a significant threat to Hawaii and, hence, are a primary focus of law enforcement officials. These organizations maintain a continuous supply of drugs to Hawaii, feeding a high level of drug abuse as well as a statewide drug market that generates high property crime, domestic abuse and child endangerment, and endangerment to the general population.

Mexican DTOs

Mexican DTOs pose the most serious organizational threat to Hawaii because their expansive drug distribution networks enable them to consistently supply Hawaii with wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine, cocaine, and Mexican black tar heroin. To distance themselves from law enforcement scrutiny, Mexican DTOs typically focus their efforts on wholesale-level sales, supplying smaller Mexican and Asia-Pacific mixed race DTOs that transport and distribute drugs in Hawaii. Of the Mexican DTOs that are based in Hawaii, the majority are located in areas with higher concentrations of Hispanic residents, particularly Honolulu and Maui Counties.

Asian DTOs

The number of Asian DTOs (typically ethnic Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Laotian, Thai, or Vietnamese) exceeds that of all other DTOs operating in the HIDTA region; however, law enforcement officials in Hawaii report that Asian DTOs are a secondary organizational threat to the

state because they lack the entrenched distribution networks of their Mexican counterparts. Asian DTOs transport and distribute wholesale quantities of ice methamphetamine from sources in California and Asia. These traffickers also transport and distribute high-potency marijuana from sources in Canada, California, and Washington. In addition, they transport small quantities of Asia heroin. Law enforcement and intelligence reporting indicates that of the Asian DTOs operating throughout Hawaii, Chinese and Korean DTOs are concentrated in the city and county of Honolulu, Filipino organizations in Hawaii County, and Chinese organizations in Kaua'i County.

Polynesian DTOs

Polynesian DTOs (typically individuals of Samoan or Tongan ethnicity) operating in the Hawaii HIDTA region transport and distribute wholesale and retail quantities of cocaine (which they generally convert to crack) and ice methamphetamine that they obtain from sources in California and Mexico. These organizations also produce wholesale quantities of marijuana and distribute the drug at both the wholesale and retail levels in Hawaii.

Local DTOs

Local DTOs are the primary retail distributors of drugs and the primary producers of marijuana in Hawaii. These organizations typically consist of 5 to 50 individuals of mixed ethnic and racial makeup—typically, but not limited to, those of native Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Hispanic, and Caucasian descent—who were born and raised in Hawaii and share either familial or close social ties. The diversity and variability of these organizations make them difficult for law enforcement officials to infiltrate and facilitate working relationships among them and other traffickers, including international DTOs (Asian, Mexican, and Polynesian) upon which they rely for supplies of ice methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin.

Production

Illicit drug production in the Hawaii HIDTA region entails primarily cannabis cultivation, limited methamphetamine production, and limited crack cocaine conversion.

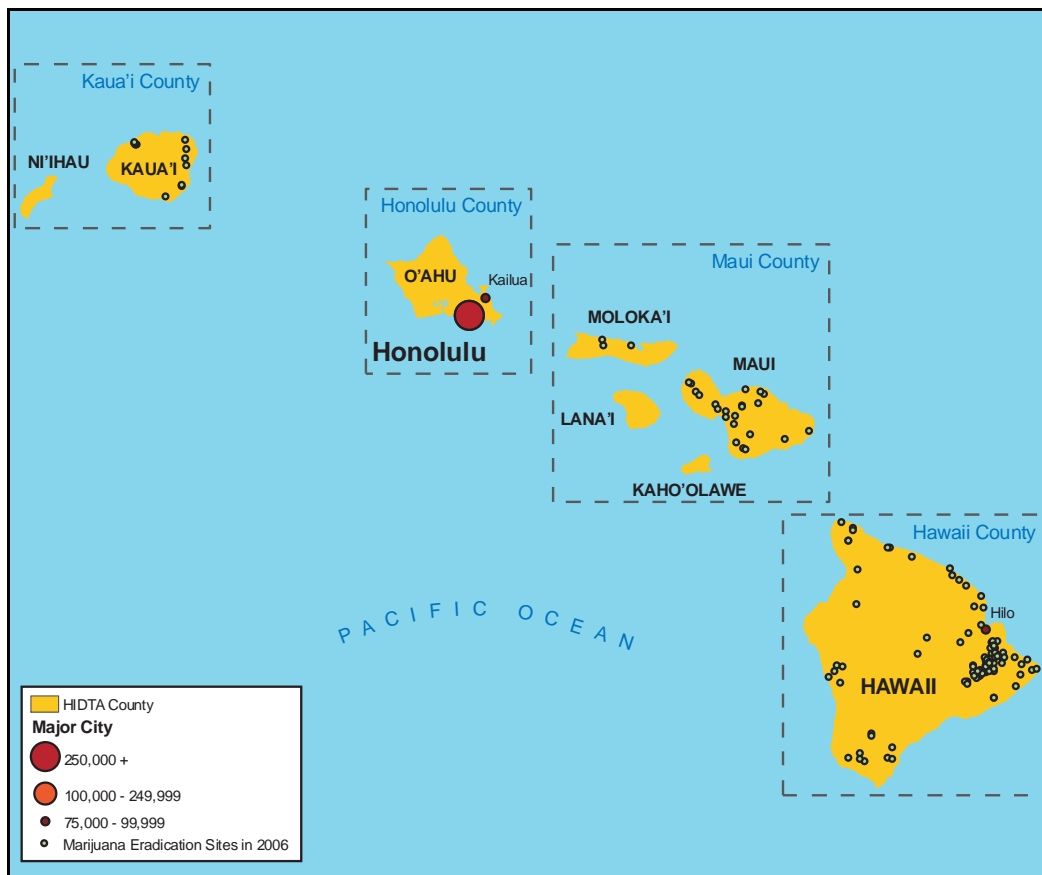


Figure 2. Marijuana eradication sites in Hawaii, 2006.

Cannabis is extensively cultivated in Hawaii at both outdoor and indoor locations. In fact, the state consistently ranks among the top four states for the total number of cannabis plants eradicated each year. (See Table 1.) However, despite the large number of cannabis plots eradicated each year in the state, sustained law enforcement pressure and interdiction efforts have resulted in a decrease in outdoor cannabis cultivation in Hawaii since 2001. (See Table 2

on page 5.) Law enforcement reporting indicates that most outdoor cannabis cultivation occurs on the islands of Hawaii, Maui, Kaua'i, and O'ahu, particularly on State Division of Land and Natural Resources lands in Hawaii and Maui Counties. Outdoor cultivation operations are conducted primarily by local Asian and Polynesian DTOs as well as some Caucasian groups, including those that have relocated to Hawaii from the U.S. mainland.

Table 1. Top Five States for Cannabis Plants Eradicated by Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program, 2002–2006

2002		2003		2004		2005		2006	
California	1,267,771	California	1,181,957	California	1,214,420	California	2,011,277	California	3,877,628
Tennessee	485,819	Tennessee	679,105	Kentucky	476,803	Kentucky	510,502	Kentucky	558,756
Hawaii	435,789	Kentucky	527,775	Tennessee	416,012	Tennessee	440,362	Tennessee	483,342
Kentucky	378,036	Hawaii	392,422	Hawaii	379,644	Hawaii	255,113	Hawaii	201,100
North Carolina	112,017	New York	99,423	Washington	134,474	Washington	136,165	Oregon	194,453

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

Table 2. Outdoor Cannabis Grow Sites Seized and Plants Eradicated in Hawaii, 2001–2006

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Plants	525,041	435,475	388,903	377,332	251,163	188,742
Grow Sites	11,934	9,865	9,662	7,945	5,096	3,974

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

Table 3. Number of Cannabis Plants Eradicated From Indoor Grow Sites in Hawaii, 2001–2006

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Plants	372	314	3,519	2,312	3,950	12,358
Grow Sites	7	3	9	13	13	49

Source: Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

Indoor cannabis cultivation in Hawaii occurs less frequently than outdoor cultivation; however, the number of indoor grow sites in the state appears to be increasing, quite likely a result of increased law enforcement pressure on outdoor growers (particularly through the use of aerial surveillance). The number of plants eradicated from indoor grow operations has increased steadily since 2001 and jumped sharply from 3,950 plants in 2005 to 12,358 plants in 2006. (See Table 3.) This sharp increase is attributable to increased law enforcement surveillance efforts, particularly at sites where aerial surveillance had detected prior outdoor cultivation operations; some indoor grow sites were located in residences or outbuildings on land formerly used for outdoor cannabis cultivation. Local Hawaiians, Caucasian independents, and Asian organizations operate most indoor grow sites in Hawaii.

Indoor Cannabis Grow Sites

Indoor cannabis cultivation sites in Hawaii range in size from a single closet to entire houses or larger buildings that are converted into sophisticated grow operations. Indoor cannabis cultivators frequently use advanced growing techniques such as plant cloning as well as automated light metering, irrigation, fertilization, and insecticides to enhance plant growth rates. The controlled environment of indoor grows also affords growers the potential for a year-round cultivation season and the ability to produce a new crop of cannabis every 90 days.

Methamphetamine production occurs sporadically and currently does not pose a significant threat; the laboratories seized are typically conversion laboratories used by local distributors to convert imported powder methamphetamine into ice methamphetamine or to “clean up” ice methamphetamine that is of poor quality. Law enforcement reporting indicates that Asian, Polynesian, and local DTOs in Hawaii are responsible for most of the methamphetamine production and ice conversion in the state. Additionally, the number of methamphetamine laboratories seized in Hawaii is low and decreasing. (See Table 4 on page 6.)

Powder cocaine is converted to crack cocaine on a limited basis in the Hawaii HIDTA region. Most is converted at or near distribution sites on an as-needed basis, typically in ounce quantities, by local distributors who, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), include African American, Mexican, and Samoan traffickers.

Transportation

Mexican DTOs smuggle most illicit drugs available in Hawaii into the state through California; these drugs originate from source areas in Mexico (ice methamphetamine and black tar heroin), South America (cocaine), and California (ice methamphetamine). Asian DTOs transport lesser but considerable and increasing quantities of illicit drugs, particularly high-potency marijuana from Canada, northern California, and Washington; ice

Table 4. Methamphetamine Laboratory Seizures in Hawaii, by County, 2002–2006

County	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Hawaii	0	0	9	0	1
Honolulu	4	4	3	7	3
Kaua'i	0	0	0	1	0
Maui	1	0	0	0	1
Total	5	4	12	8	5

Source: National Clandestine Laboratory Seizure System.

methamphetamine and heroin from Asia; and opium from Laos and Cambodia. Illicit drugs typically are transported to and through entry points on the island of O'ahu (particularly the Honolulu International Airport), primarily through mail services or couriers aboard commercial flights. These methods do not allow for the transportation of large amounts of illicit drugs at any one time; however, the frequency with which Hawaii-based DTOs and criminal groups travel to and from the U.S. mainland helps to maintain adequate supplies for distribution networks.

Most of the drugs transported to O'ahu are consumed there; however, a portion is transported on interisland flights to neighboring islands for subsequent distribution. Furthermore, Hawaii's state-wide system of airports consists of 11 airports that serve commercial airlines and general aviation as well as 4 airports that serve general aviation only. International airports and airfields on six of the eight islands allow for direct flight service to and from major U.S. mainland, Asian, and Canadian cities, a situation that quite likely facilitates the transportation of illicit drugs from these locations not only into Honolulu but also directly into Hawaii, Maui, and Kaua'i Counties.

Local and Polynesian DTOs generally control the transportation of marijuana produced in Hawaii to markets within and outside the state. Marijuana produced in Hawaii is typically transported in multipound and multiounce quantities from production sites to drug markets throughout the state (where most is consumed) by private vehicle and couriers aboard interisland commercial flights and to drug

markets outside the state by mail, package delivery services, and couriers aboard commercial flights.

The maritime conveyance of illicit drugs in transit to and from the U.S. mainland is perhaps the most significant **intelligence gap** with regard to the drug situation in Hawaii and a growing concern among federal, state, and local law enforcement in Hawaii. The state's system of commercial harbors consists of 10 harbors on six islands, through which an estimated 99 percent of commercial goods imported to Hawaii enter the state. Law enforcement has received anecdotal information indicating that illicit drugs are being shipped to the

Cargo-Container Interdiction Program

Since the summer of 2006, representatives from DEA, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Transportation Security Administration, Hawaii Airport Task Force, Hawaii County Police Department, Honolulu Police Department Narcotics/Vice Canine Group, Kaua'i Police Department, and Maui Police Department have met periodically to discuss the development of a cargo-container initiative to counter container-based drug smuggling.

These representatives have also met with the heads of local shipping companies and other businesses involved in shipping cargo and goods from the West Coast to Hawaii and also between the Hawaiian islands. They have developed excellent working relationships within the transshipping industry that will enable law enforcement to target drug dealers who use cargo containers to transport their loads of illegal drugs.

islands in containerized cargo bound for Hawaii; however, relatively few seizures have been made, thereby impeding a full assessment of the threat. As a result, a Cargo-Container Interdiction Program designed to address the maritime smuggling issue has been proposed to the Hawaii HIDTA by several law enforcement agencies operating in the state; it is expected to become a HIDTA initiative in 2007. (See text box on page 6.)

Distribution

Mexican DTOs and criminal groups are the predominant wholesale distributors of illicit drugs, with the exception of marijuana produced in Hawaii, which is generally distributed at all levels by local and Polynesian DTOs in the region. Various local DTOs, criminal groups, and independent dealers, supplied largely by Mexican DTOs, control midlevel and retail sales. Retail drug sales in Hawaii often occur at open-air drug markets in urban areas, in clubs or bars, or through prearranged delivery. Law enforcement reporting indicates that distributors use a variety of means to communicate, including cellular phones, pagers, and text messaging, often using code words to avoid obvious detection.

Drug-Related Crime

Most of the crime perpetrated in Hawaii has a drug nexus; however, it is difficult to conclusively quantify such crime because the state of Hawaii does not specifically track drug-related crime. Nonetheless, all state and local law enforcement agencies in Hawaii that responded to the NDIC National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2006 report that methamphetamine is the drug that most contributes to violent crime and property crime statewide. Furthermore, 2006 Western States Information Network (WSIN) data show that a majority of the critical events² reported by law enforcement in 2006 in Hawaii were drug-related (2,992 of 4,511), particularly those pertaining to methamphetamine (1,411 of 2,992),

followed by marijuana (145 of 2,992), cocaine (124 of 2,992), and heroin (12 of 2,992).

Marijuana-related violence is also a concern in Hawaii; most of the violence is associated with protection of cannabis plots. Law enforcement officers occasionally encounter growers who resort to violence to protect their crops or use booby traps to injure law enforcement officers or others who come upon their grow site.

Abuse

Ice methamphetamine is the most widely abused illicit drug in Hawaii, followed by high-potency marijuana. Cocaine, heroin, and ODDs are also commonly abused throughout Hawaii, but to a lesser extent. The abuse of prescription narcotics, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, and methadone, is at a low level in comparison with the abuse of other drugs; however, prescription narcotic abuse is increasing and has become a serious concern among law enforcement personnel in Hawaii.

Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) data from 2000 through 2005 for Hawaii show a significant overall increase in the number of treatment admissions for methamphetamine, a significant overall increase in admissions for other opiates (primarily prescription narcotics), a considerable but less pronounced overall increase in primary marijuana admissions, and an overall decrease in admissions for cocaine and heroin. (See Figure 3 on page 8.)

Illicit Finance

Mexican and Asian DTOs are the most prominent drug money launderers in the Hawaii HIDTA region. These DTOs primarily use package delivery services but also employ couriers aboard commercial flights to transport drug proceeds in bulk from Hawaii to drug source areas. Mexican and Asian DTOs as well as other traffickers operating in Hawaii also launder drug proceeds through the use of wire remittance services, money services businesses, and

2. Western States Information Network (WSIN) defines a critical event as any drug-related field activity, including drug buys, buy-busts, surveillances, drug raids, money laundering pickups, informant meetings, etc. In 2006, however, other crimes, not necessarily drug-related, were included as critical events, thus precluding trend analysis between 2005 and 2006 aggregate data.

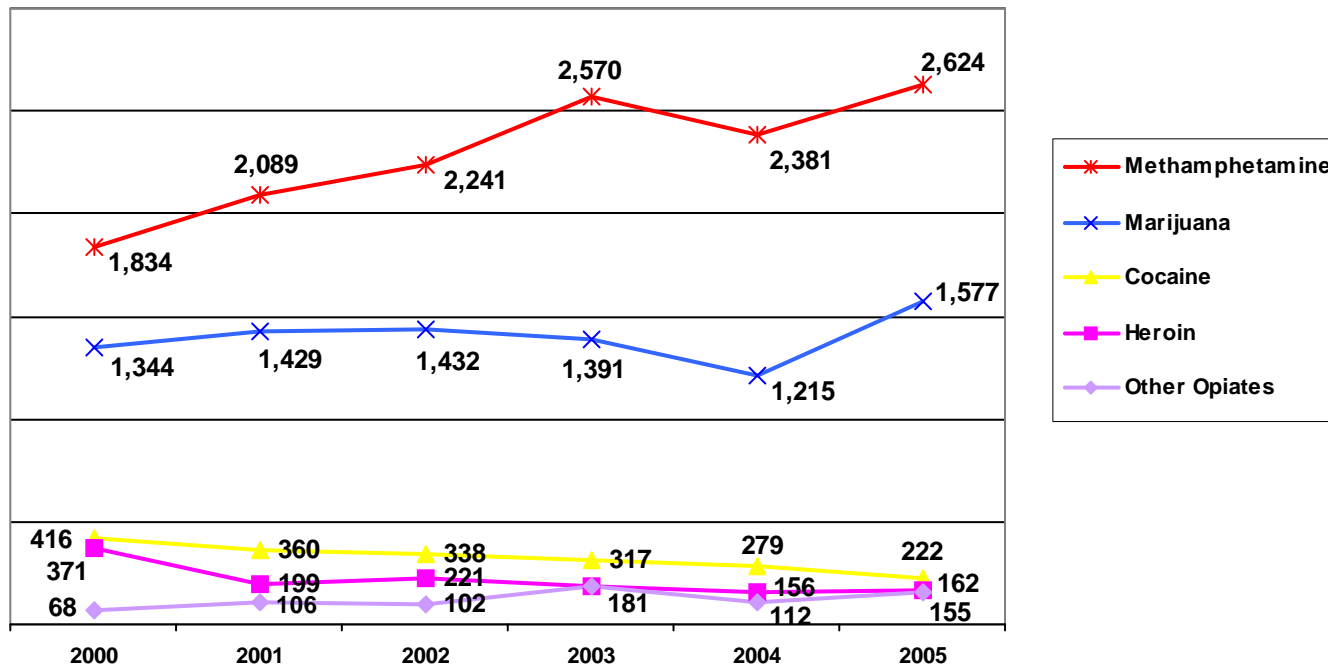


Figure 3. Hawaii drug treatment admissions, 2000–2005.

Source: Treatment Episode Data Set.

structured bank transactions. Moreover, a number of traffickers, particularly retail-level traffickers, launder drug proceeds through the purchase of expensive consumer items such as automobiles, clothing, and jewelry. Nonetheless, money laundering techniques used by DTOs in Hawaii range from complex to simple, based on the DTO and the level at which it operates.

Outlook

Over the next year, indoor cannabis cultivation in Hawaii most likely will increase, while outdoor cultivation will continue to trend downward. Growing demand for high-potency marijuana and intensified enforcement efforts on the part of law

enforcement will quite likely drive more outdoor cannabis cultivators indoors. Moreover, the enhanced security and controlled growing environment afforded by indoor grow operations will prove to be an added incentive for growers to establish indoor operations.

The threat posed to Hawaii by the trafficking and abuse of ice methamphetamine will not diminish in the near term. Decreased availability in the first half of 2006 led to a simultaneous price spike. Availability has returned to previous levels; however, prices remain slightly higher than presupply shortage levels. Prices will likely remain at this level.

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