



HIGH INTENSITY DRUG TRAFFICKING AREAS (HIDTA)

2021 EFFORTS TO STOP METHAMPHETAMINE TRAFFICKING

Office of National Drug Control Policy

JANUARY 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Program, federal, state, local, territorial, and Tribal law enforcement agencies and their partners lead aggressive efforts to disrupt and dismantle methamphetamine production and trafficking organizations, and reduce its use across the Nation.

From 2020 to 2021, methamphetamine trafficking correlated with serious public health and safety concerns for local communities nationwide. At the end of 2021, nearly every indicator of methamphetamine availability, use, and purity continued to increase across the country.

Indicators of the threat posed by methamphetamine, and the actions taken by the regional HIDTAs to address that threat are as follows:

- All availability measures of highly-pure, low-cost Mexican methamphetamine at the street-level continued to increase.
 - To address this threat, the 33 regional HIDTAs seized drugs, shuttered clandestine laboratories, and coordinated initiatives aimed at reducing availability and use of methamphetamine.¹
 - Nationwide, HIDTAs seized more than 195 tons of methamphetamine, and 55 clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in 2021.² Along the Southwest Border alone, HIDTAs seized nearly 82 metric tons of methamphetamine.³
- The consequences of methamphetamine trafficking threatened the safety and wellbeing of communities and citizens. From 2020 to 2021, overdose deaths involving psychostimulants⁴ (typically in combination with other illicit synthetic drugs like fentanyl) increased from 26,575 to 35,842.⁵ Methamphetamine trafficking continued to correlate with violence. Of the 3,121 drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and 381 criminal organizations involved in methamphetamine trafficking and under investigation by HIDTAs, 792 DTOs and 38 criminal organizations were associated with violence.^{6 7}
 - To counter efforts to traffic methamphetamine into and throughout the Nation's communities, the HIDTA Program coordinated law enforcement at all levels to identify, disrupt, and dismantle DTOs and criminal organizations.

¹ The HIDTA Program defines a DTO as an organization consisting of five or more persons, including at least one identified leader, that (1) has a clearly defined chain-of-command and (2) whose principal activity is to generate income or acquire assets through a continuing series of illegal drug production, manufacturing, importation, transportation, or distribution activities.

² HIDTA. Data from: Performance Management Process (PMP) system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

³ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

⁴ The *Drug Enforcement Administration 2017 Drugs of Abuse* resource guide classifies methamphetamine as a psychostimulant, which speeds up the human body's systems to produce a "rush" or other sensation (pg. 54). Other psychostimulants include caffeine, amphetamines (such as the prescription drug Adderall), and methylphenidate. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics, methamphetamine is the primary contributor to overdose deaths involving psychostimulants.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control. Data from: WONDER. Accessed August 31, 2022. Note that 2021 is provisional data at the date of access.

⁶ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

⁷ For HIDTA reporting purposes, an organization is considered violent if it routinely engages in kidnapping, extortion, murder, aggravated assault, robbery, or other crimes involving force or the threat of force.

- In 2021, HIDTAs identified 3,743 DTOs, money laundering organizations, and criminal organizations trafficking quantities of methamphetamine,⁸ and disrupted and/or dismantled 1,407 of them.

⁸ The HIDTA Program defines a criminal organization as one or more individual(s) trafficking in drugs, firearms, and/or smuggled bulk cash proceeds. A criminal organization does not meet the definitions of a DTO or MLO due to the size or its lack of a clearly defined chain-of-command.

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to the *Substance Use-Disorder Prevention That Supports Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities Act* (SUPPORT Act), 21 U.S.C. § 1706(o), ONDCP is providing Congress with this report on the HIDTA Program. This document is an overview of the program's 2021 efforts to stop methamphetamine trafficking in the United States.

The HIDTA Program, administered by ONDCP, consisted of 33 regional HDTAs during 2021. All HIDTA regions, which are designated by county, are affected by methamphetamine and dedicate resources to address the threat posed by trafficking of this drug. Relying upon a variety of data sources, this report summarizes 2021 trends and patterns associated with methamphetamine trafficking in the United States and the HIDTA Program's efforts to address it.

The report begins with a situation assessment, highlighting the continued prevalence of Mexican methamphetamine in the United States in 2021, according to 33 regional HIDTA threat assessments, the *National Forensic Laboratory Information System 2021 Midyear Report* published by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and reporting from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). It summarizes the HIDTA Program's accomplishments, and highlights several methamphetamine initiatives. The report concludes with a summary, and a forward-looking assessment of the challenges faced by the law enforcement community.

SITUATION ASSESSMENT

Mexican DTOs continue to be the primary producers and suppliers of low-cost, high-purity methamphetamine available in the United States.^{9 10} Domestic production of methamphetamine does occur; however, clandestine methamphetamine laboratory seizures across the United States have steadily decreased since 2012.¹¹

⁹ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published March 2, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022. (Note: this is the most recent version available.)

<https://www.dea.gov/documents/2021/03/02/2020-national-drug-threat-assessment>

¹⁰ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2021 Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community. Published April 9, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022. [ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf \(dni.gov\)](#)

¹¹ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

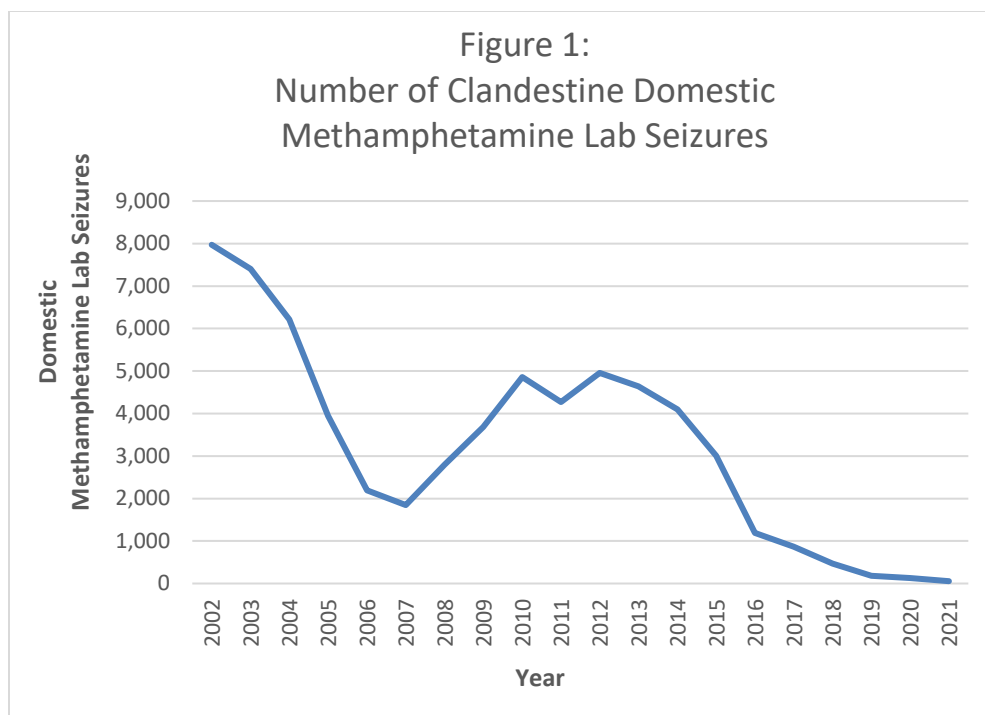


FIGURE 1. This chart demonstrates a decrease in the number of clandestine labs in the United States. These trends suggest that much of the methamphetamine available in the United States is crossing the Southwest Border from Mexico.¹²

The Southwest Border remains the main entry point for the majority of methamphetamine entering the United States.¹³ Most methamphetamine seizures occur at ports of entry.¹⁴ Mexican DTOs control wholesale methamphetamine distribution, while both Mexican and domestic criminal groups typically control retail distribution in the United States.¹⁵ While methamphetamine precursors are often transported via maritime shipments from China and India, finished methamphetamine is commonly trafficked overland across the Southwest Border.¹⁶ Traffickers employ various techniques to transport and conceal methamphetamine, such as using human couriers, parcel services, and commercial conveyances.¹⁷

¹² El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC). Data from: The National Seizure System. Accessed September 29, 2022.

¹³ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published March 2, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁴ Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Data from: The CBP Public Data Portal. Accessed November 4, 2022. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-public-data-portal>

¹⁵ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published March 2, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁶ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2021 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community. Published April 9, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁷ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published March 2, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022.

Methamphetamine is available throughout the United States, and is most prevalent in the West, Midwest, and Southeast regions of the country.^{18 19} As of the most recent data from 2021, seizures sampled through the DEA Methamphetamine Profiling Program (MPP) continue to reflect high purity. In the second half of 2021, methamphetamine sampled through the MPP averaged 97.1 percent purity.²⁰ Seizure data also attest to the continued availability of methamphetamine, as evidenced by DEA’s National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS), which shows that methamphetamine was the most frequently identified drug between January 2021 through June 2021.²¹

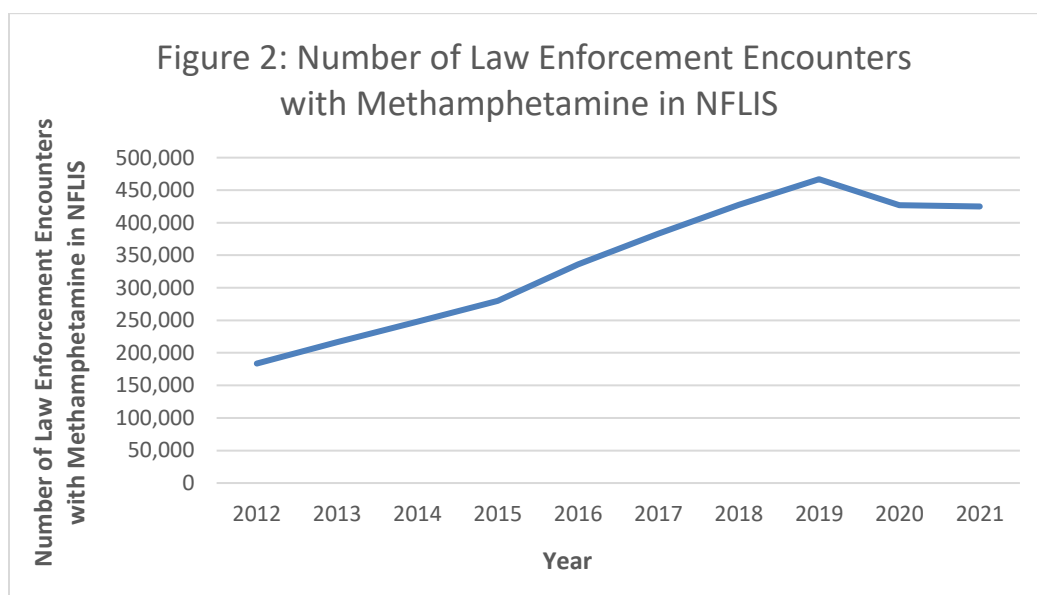


FIGURE 2. This chart depicts a general increase, followed by a more recent decrease and leveling off, in the number of law enforcement encounters with methamphetamine.²²

During 2021, drug overdose deaths continued to rise throughout the United States. Provisional predicted fatalities due to overdose at year end 2020 increased from 93,655 to 108,886 at year end 2021.²³ Synthetic opioids, including illicit fentanyl and fentanyl analogs were provisionally predicted to have been involved in 75 percent of the overdose deaths in 2021. Psychostimulants,

¹⁸ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published March 2, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022.

¹⁹ 2022 HIDTA threat assessment reporting.

²⁰ Drug Enforcement Administration. Methamphetamine Profiling Program. 2021 Methamphetamine Profiling Program Report. Published July, 2021. Accessed September 29, 2022.

²¹ Drug Enforcement Administration Diversion Control Division. National Forensic Laboratory Information System: NFLIS-Drug 2021 midyear report. Published April, 2022. Accessed September 29, 2022. [2021 NFLIS-Drug Midyear Report.pdf](#)

²² Drug Enforcement Administration Diversion Control Division. Data from: National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS). Accessed September 12, 2022. Note that this data is provisional.

²³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vital Statistics Rapid Release.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm> Accessed September 23, 2022. 2021 data is provisional in nature.

including methamphetamine, were predicted to have been involved in 31 percent of the overdose deaths in 2021.²⁴

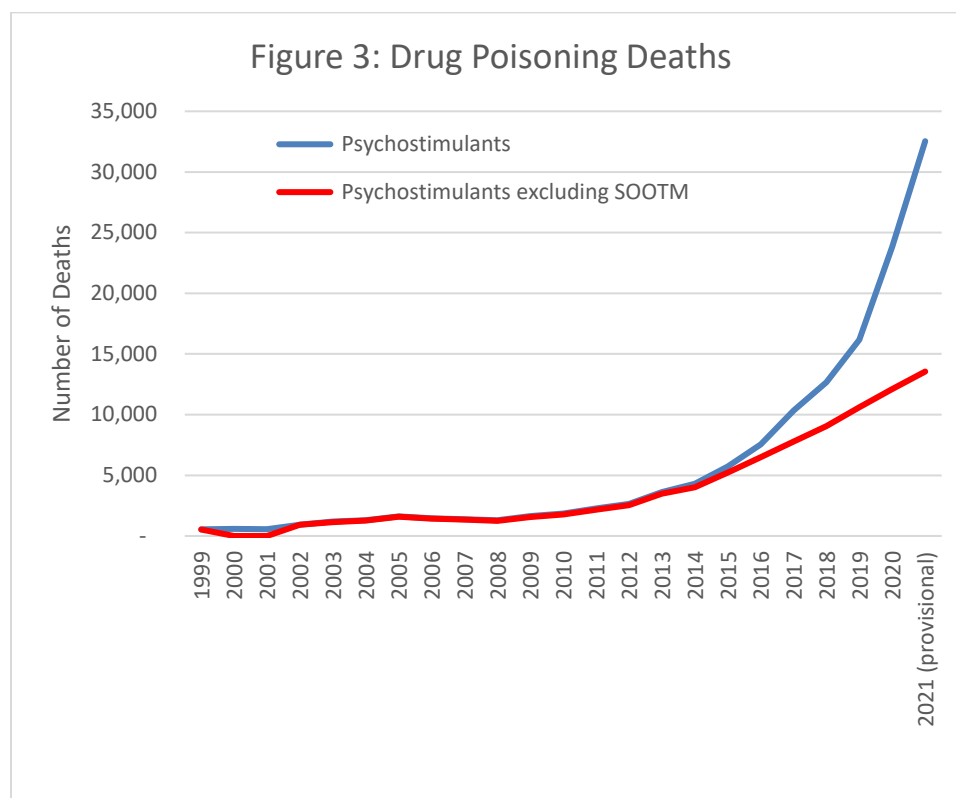


FIGURE 3. This chart depicts the increase in the overall number of drug poisoning deaths involving psychostimulants (including methamphetamine).²⁵ To demonstrate the contributing role played by other synthetic, such as fentanyl, the chart also depicts drug poisoning deaths excluding synthetic opioids other than methadone.

As domestic laboratory seizures continue to decline, methamphetamine seizures have recently decreased and leveled off after a long period of increase, as reported by Southwest Border HIDTAs. The HIDTA Program reports that 21 out of 33 regional HIDTAs identified methamphetamine as their first or second most serious drug threat. Of those, eight regional HIDTAs identified methamphetamine as their top drug threat.

²⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vital Statistics Rapid Release. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm> Accessed September 23, 2022. 2021 data is provisional in nature.

²⁵ Centers for Disease Control. Data from: WONDER. Accessed August 31, 2022. Note that 2021 is provisional data at the date of access.

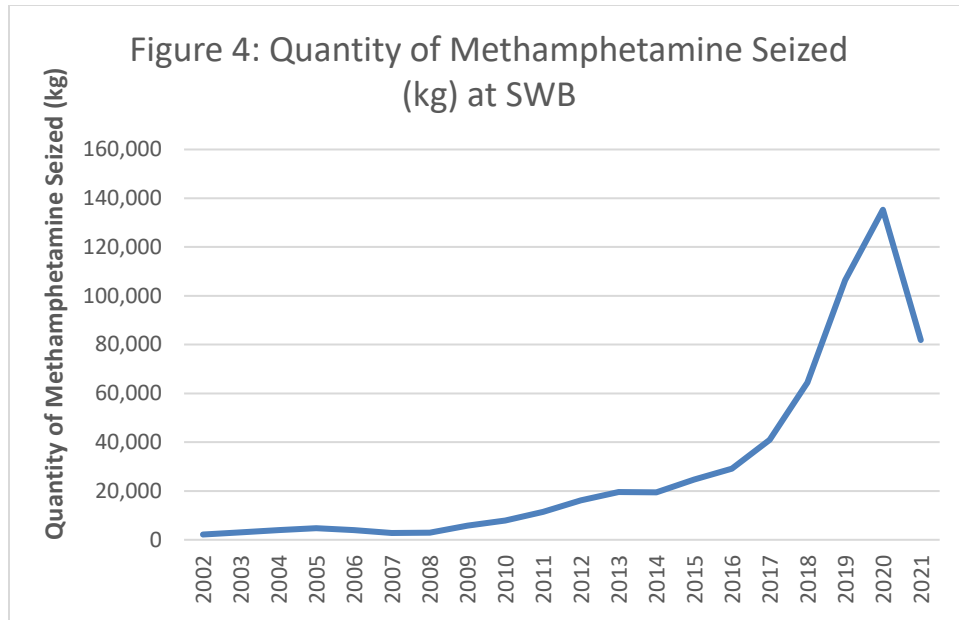


FIGURE 4. This chart depicts a decrease in the methamphetamine seizures (in kilograms) reported by the Southwest Border HIDTAs since 2020.²⁶

In addition, the transportation of Mexican methamphetamine smuggled in liquid such as gasoline, paint, water, and other fluids is posing additional challenges to law enforcement efforts to detect and seize methamphetamine entering the United States.²⁷ Both DEA reporting and regional HIDTA threat assessments report methamphetamine conversion laboratories within the United States, where chemical methamphetamine or methamphetamine in solution produced in Mexico is processed into crystalline form once in the United States.

HIDTA PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2021

HIDTA initiatives (task forces) work to disrupt and dismantle DTO networks that traffic Mexican methamphetamine into and throughout the United States. The HIDTA Program's continued efforts to address methamphetamine trafficking played a significant role in the response to this threat. Specifically, HIDTA initiatives reported the following in 2021:

- Methamphetamine seizures exceeded 195 metric tons.²⁸
- Disruption and/or dismantlement of 1,407 DTOs, money laundering organizations, and criminal organizations trafficking methamphetamine—representing 38 percent of all 3,743 DTOs, money laundering organizations, and criminal organizations identified as trafficking methamphetamine by HIDTA Program.²⁹

²⁶ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

²⁷ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2020 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published March 2, 2021. Accessed August 29, 2022.

²⁸ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

²⁹ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

- Dismantling of 55 clandestine methamphetamine laboratories within the United States, depriving domestic methamphetamine producers of facilities and revenue.³⁰

Each regional HIDTA has a strategy to guide, organize, and coordinate efforts aimed at eliminating methamphetamine trafficking. Based on these strategies, HDTAs channeled resources for the coordination of law enforcement, public health agencies, other community stakeholders, and the public through locally-tailored initiatives. Examples of these efforts in 2021 include the following:

- HDTAs created or continued to fund specialized, intelligence-led, interagency methamphetamine task forces to counter the threat from Mexican DTOs operating across the United States.
- Due to their position as a transit point, HDTAs located along the Southwest Border focused their interdiction efforts on the importation and transport of methamphetamine from Mexico with a concerted strategy linking information, resources, and law enforcement activities across a four-state area.
- HIDTA interdiction task forces intercepted methamphetamine trafficked across the United States through air and rail travel, highway transit, parcel shipment, and maritime shipping.

Finally, law enforcement partners affiliated with the HIDTA Program continue to identify and report alarming connections between methamphetamine trafficking and violent crime. Of the 3,121 DTOs identified by HDTAs as trafficking methamphetamine in 2021, 792 (25 percent of the total) were considered violent.^{31 32}

THE HIDTA PROGRAM'S NATIONAL INITIATIVES

In addition to regional HIDTA initiatives and specialized task forces, the HIDTA-funded National Emerging Threats Initiative (NETI) supports a coordinated strategy for emerging drug-related threats, which includes methamphetamine.³³ NETI works with state and local leaders to explore policy, regulatory, and enforcement options to reduce the availability of methamphetamine throughout the United States.

Furthermore, throughout 2021, the HIDTA-funded Domestic Highway Enforcement (DHE) initiative provided assistance to HIDTA interdiction task forces through a nationwide highway enforcement information-sharing platform.³⁴ The coordinated highway enforcement strategy combines traffic safety efforts with information regarding criminals and associated organizations that use the Nation's highways to transport their contraband, weapons, illegal proceeds, and other illicit commodities. The DHE information sharing community, in collaboration with the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), is actively engaged in providing methamphetamine trafficking trends and analysis to federal, state, local, and Tribal law enforcement nationwide. These efforts are leading to results. In 2021, nationwide DHE-reported seizures included 1,503 kilograms of

³⁰ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

³¹ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.

³² Overall, of 7,667 DTOs under investigation by HIDTA initiatives in 2021, 2,004 were considered violent.

³³ Additional information regarding NETI can be found at http://www.nhac.org/National_Initiatives/NETI.html.

³⁴ Additional information regarding DHE can be found at http://www.nhac.org/National_Initiatives/DHE.html.

methamphetamine, 1,862 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine and several other forms of methamphetamine in various forms.³⁵

SUMMARY

Despite the successes of the regional HIDTAs and national initiatives, methamphetamine remained a significant challenge for law enforcement and public health partners in 2021. The threats posed by domestic and Mexican methamphetamine are serious and persistent. Disrupting the movement and sale of this drug is a high priority for communities, and is essential to reversing the rise in overdose deaths associated with psychostimulants.

ONDCP and the HIDTA Program are well positioned to build on past successes by continuing to support initiatives that integrate law enforcement and public health partners by facilitating information sharing, equipping law enforcement, and reducing demand through public awareness and education. The holistic approach supported by the HIDTA Program, its task forces, and its national initiatives ensures the necessary flexibility and adaptability to address observed trends in the production, trafficking, and use of methamphetamine in the United States.

³⁵ HIDTA. Data from: PMP system. Accessed August, 29, 2022.