

HIGH INTENSITY DRUG TRAFFICKING AREAS

2023 EFFORTS TO STOP METHAMPHETAMINE TRAFFICKING

THE WHITE HOUSE
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY





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.

During 2023, methamphetamine trafficking correlated with serious public health and safety concerns for communities nationwide. At the end of 2023, most indicators of methamphetamine availability, use, and purity trended downward but remained high.

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 trended downward, but remained high.
- To address this threat, the 33 regional HIDTAs seized drugs, shuttered clandestine laboratories, and coordinated initiatives aimed at reducing availability and use of methamphetamine.
- In 2023, HIDTAs seized nearly 115 metric tons of methamphetamine, of which 53 metric tons were seized along the Southwest Border, representing 13 percent and 17 percent decreases from seizures in 2022, respectively.^{1 2} HIDTAs also seized a historic low of 34 clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in 2023, a decrease of 47 percent since 2022.
- The consequences of methamphetamine trafficking threatened the safety and wellbeing of communities and citizens. From 2022 to 2023, overdose deaths involving a combination of psychostimulants³ and other illicit synthetic drugs such as fentanyl decreased slightly from 34,022 to 33,830, and overdose deaths from psychostimulants alone decreased.⁴ Methamphetamine trafficking continued to correlate with violence. Of the 1,468 drug trafficking organizations (DTOs), money laundering organizations (MLOs), and criminal organizations newly identified by HIDTAs in 2023 for methamphetamine trafficking, nearly 44 percent had engaged in documented acts of violence.⁵
- 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, MLOs, and criminal organizations.
- In 2023, HIDTAs identified 1,468 DTOs, money laundering organizations, and criminal organizations trafficking quantities of methamphetamine, and disrupted and/or dismantled 1,261 of them.⁶



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 2023 efforts to stop methamphetamine trafficking in the United States.

The HIDTA Program, administered by ONDCP, consisted of 33 regional HDTAs during 2023. 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 2023 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 2023, according to threat and performance reporting from the 33 regional HDTAs, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) *National Drug Threat Assessment* (NDTA) and reporting from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). It summarizes the HIDTA Program’s accomplishments, and highlights several methamphetamine-focused 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.^{7 8} Domestic production of methamphetamine does occur; however, clandestine methamphetamine laboratory seizures by HIDTA initiatives across the United States have declined from 5,000 lab seizures in 2012 to just 34 lab seizures in 2023 according to HIDTA Performance Management Process (PMP) data.⁹

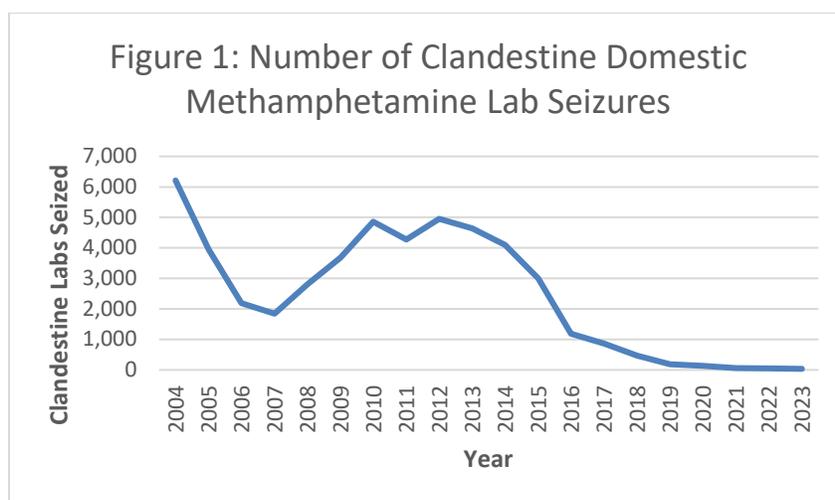


FIGURE 1. This chart demonstrates the significant decrease in the number of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories seized by regional HDTAs in the United States, as reported in the



HIDTA PMP system. This decrease, coupled with methamphetamine seizure data, indicates that much of the methamphetamine available domestically is trafficked into the United States.¹⁰

The Southwest Border remains the main entry point for the majority of methamphetamine, and most other illicit drugs entering the United States.¹¹ CBP reported Southwest Border methamphetamine seizures totaling 63,688 kilograms at ports of entry during fiscal year (FY) 2023.¹² Mexican DTOs, namely the Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels, dominate the production and distribution of most illicit drugs including methamphetamine into the United States, while associate Mexican and domestic criminal groups typically control retail distribution in the United States.^{13 14} While methamphetamine precursors are transported from primarily China and India to Mexico, finished methamphetamine is commonly trafficked into the United States by land across the Southwest Border.^{15 16} The predominant smuggling method among Mexican DTOs to place small, multikilogram loads in privately owned vehicles, which can more easily blend into the large volume of traffic at major ports of entry (POE). DEA assesses that privately owned vehicles and tractor trailers remain the most common method of methamphetamine smuggling by Mexican DTOs, and those shipments primarily transit legal POE.¹⁷

Methamphetamine is also smuggled through POEs using pedestrians acting as couriers, commercial flights, and commercial buses.¹⁸ Smuggling methamphetamine in its liquid form, often mixed with other liquids (referred to as “in solution”) remains prevalent and continues to pose additional challenges to law enforcement efforts to detect and seize methamphetamine entering the United States.¹⁹ The DEA NDTA, and regional HIDTA threat assessments report methamphetamine conversion laboratories within the United States, where methamphetamine in solution produced in Mexico is processed into crystalline form once in the United States.^{20 21} DEA reporting reflects a rise in the seizure of such laboratories, increasing from 25 labs in 2020 to 34 labs in 2023.²²

Methamphetamine is available throughout the United States, and is most prevalent in the West, Midwest, and Southeast regions of the country, though it can be found in nearly every major and minor drug market.²³ According to the DEA, the 13,763 total seizures sampled through DEA laboratory testing in 2023 reflected a 94.9 percent purity rate on average, with a median sample purity of 98 percent.²⁴

Methamphetamine seizures have generally decreased since 2019 after a long period of increase, as reported by Southwest Border HIDTAs, according to PMP data.²⁵ Despite that decline, the HIDTA Program reports that 21 out of 33 regional HIDTAs identified methamphetamine as their first or second most serious drug threat. Of those, four regional HIDTAs identified methamphetamine as their top drug threat.²⁶

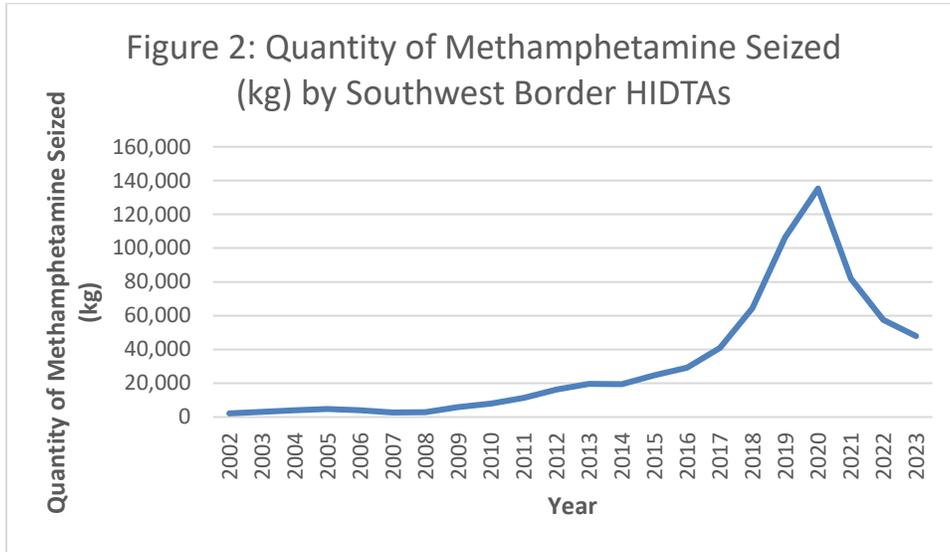


FIGURE 2. This chart depicts a decrease in the methamphetamine seizures (in kilograms) reported by the Southwest Border HIDTAs since 2020.²⁷

From 2022 to 2023, based on provisional data, drug poisoning deaths in the United States decreased by 5.47 percent. Provisional fatalities due to overdose decreased from 107,941 in 2022 to 102,036 in 2023. Psychostimulants, including methamphetamine, were estimated to have been involved in 33 percent of the overdose deaths in 2023. Sixty-six percent of deaths involving psychostimulants in 2023 also involved synthetic opioids such as fentanyl.²⁸

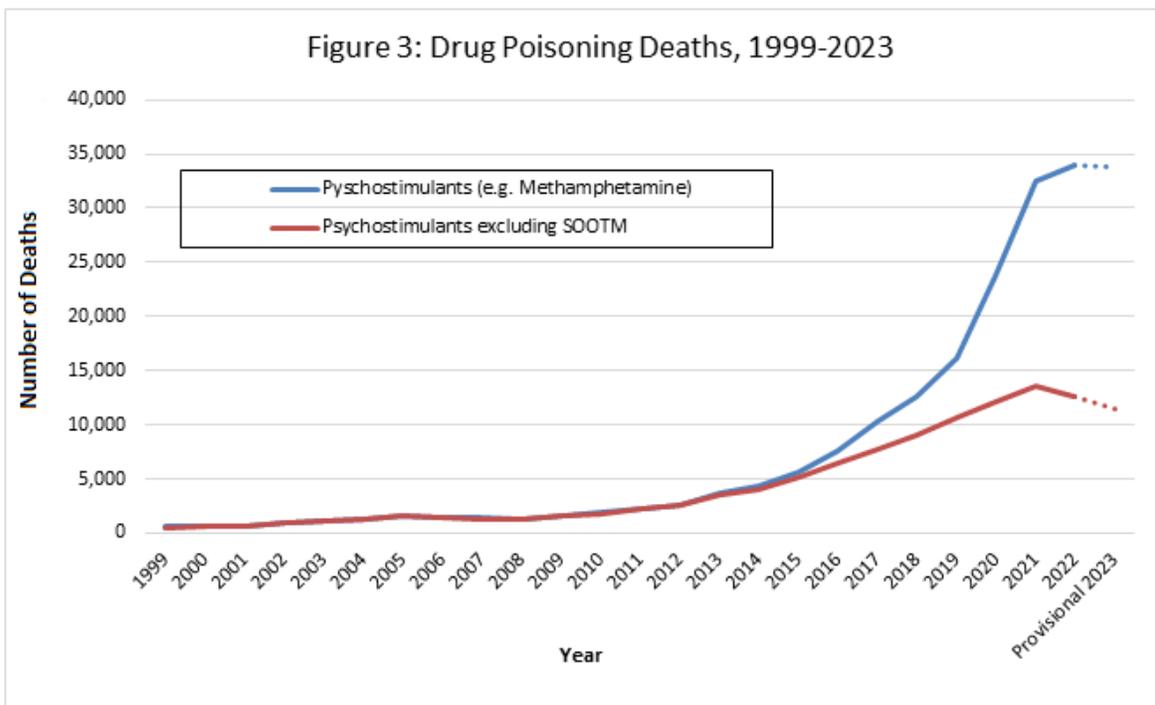




FIGURE 3. This chart depicts the increase in the overall number of drug poisoning deaths involving psychostimulants (including methamphetamine) since 1999.²⁹ The chart also indicates a projected decrease in the number of overdose deaths associated with psychostimulants alone. To demonstrate the primary role played by synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, the chart also depicts drug poisoning deaths excluding synthetic opioids other than methadone (SOOTM). Note that 2023 data is provisional.

HIDTA PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2023

HIDTA initiatives (task forces) work to disrupt and dismantle DTO networks that traffic 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 2023:

- Methamphetamine seizures totaled nearly 115 metric tons, a 4 percent decrease from 119 metric tons in 2022, in line with the 34 percent decrease a year prior.³⁰
- Disruption and/or dismantlement of 1,586 DTOs, MLOs, and criminal organizations trafficking methamphetamine.³¹
- Dismantling of 34 clandestine methamphetamine laboratories within the United States, depriving domestic methamphetamine producers of facilities and revenue.³²

Each regional HIDTA has a strategy to guide, organize, and coordinate efforts aimed at eliminating methamphetamine trafficking. Based on these strategies, HIDTAs 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 2023 include the following:

- HIDTAs created and continued to fund specialized, intelligence-led, interagency task forces to counter methamphetamine, and other illicit drugs trafficked by Mexican DTOs and affiliates operating across the United States.
- Due to their position as a transit point, HIDTAs 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 and recorded and shared best practices with law enforcement partners.

Finally, law enforcement partners affiliated with the HIDTA Program continue to identify and report alarming connections between methamphetamine trafficking and violent crime. Of the 1,468 DTOs, MLOs, and criminal organizations identified by HIDTAs as trafficking methamphetamine in 2023, 648 (44 percent of the total) were considered violent.³³



THE HIDTA PROGRAM'S NATIONAL INITIATIVES

In addition to regional HIDTA initiatives and specialized task forces, the HIDTA-funded Drug Threat Analysis Group (DTAG) supports a coordinated strategy for emerging drug-related threats, which includes methamphetamine.³⁴ DTAG 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 2023, the HIDTA-funded Domestic Highway Enforcement (DHE) initiative provided assistance to HIDTA interdiction task forces through a nationwide highway enforcement information-sharing platform.³⁵ 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, Tribal, and territorial law enforcement nationwide. These efforts are leading to results. In 2023, nationwide DHE-reported seizures included 12,223 kilograms of methamphetamine (formulation not specified), 1,141 of methamphetamine powder, and 341 kilograms and 488,093 milliliters of methamphetamine in solution.³⁶

SUMMARY

Despite the successes of the regional HDTAs and national initiatives, methamphetamine remained a significant challenge for law enforcement and public health partners in 2023. 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.

The HIDTA Program is 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.

¹ HIDTA. Data from Performance Management Process (PMP) system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

² HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

³ 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. The Centers for Disease Control define a psychostimulant as a subset of stimulants that have a higher likelihood of being misused due to their effects on the central nervous system. Psychostimulants with abuse potential include both illegal drugs, such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and ecstasy, as well as prescription stimulants. All psychostimulants are stimulants, but not all stimulants are psychostimulants. Accessed December 4th, 2024.



<https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/about/stimulant-overdose.html#:~:text=Quick%20Facts%3A%20Psychostimulants%E2%80%8E,misused%20and%20are%20considered%20addictive>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control. Data from WONDER. Accessed June 25, 2024. Note that 2023 is provisional data at the date of access.

⁵ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

⁶ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

⁷ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

⁸ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community. Published February, 2024. Accessed June 20, 2024.

<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2023-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

⁹ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

¹⁰ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

¹¹ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

¹² Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Data from: The CBP Public Data Portal. Accessed June 26, 2024.

<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-public-data-portal>

¹³ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2023-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

¹⁴ HIDTA threat assessment reporting. June, 2023.

¹⁵ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. 2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community. Published February, 2024. Accessed June 20, 2024.

<https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2023-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

¹⁶ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

¹⁷ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

¹⁸ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

¹⁹ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

²⁰ Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024.

²¹ HIDTA threat assessment reporting. June, 2023.

²² Drug Enforcement Administration. 2024 National Drug Threat Assessment. Published May, 2024. Note that 2023 is provisional data at the date of access.

²³ HIDTA threat assessment reporting. June, 2023.

²⁴ DEA, (response to request for information). June 27, 2024.

²⁵ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

²⁶ HIDTA threat assessment reporting. June, 2023.

²⁷ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

²⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vital Statistics Rapid Release.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm> Accessed June 25, 2024. Note that 2023 is provisional data at the date of access.

²⁹ Centers for Disease Control. Data from: WONDER. Accessed June 25, 2024. Note that 2023 is provisional data at the date of access.

³⁰ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

³¹ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

³² HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

³³ HIDTA. Data from PMP system. Accessed June 18, 2024.

³⁴ In 2024, the National Emerging Threats Initiative (NETI) was renamed to reflect a broader focus on the analysis of all drug threats, not just those that are emergent. Additional information regarding DTAG can be found at hidtaprogram.org/emergingthreats.php.

³⁵ Additional information regarding DHE can be found at hidtaprogram.org/dhe.php

³⁶ El Paso Intelligence Center. Data from: National Seizure System. Accessed June 26, 2024.