



MISSISSIPPI BUREAU OF NARCOTICS
DRUG THREAT ASSESSMENT
March 2023



State of Mississippi
Department of Public Safety
Bureau of Narcotics
Intelligence Division

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I. SCOPE

The Mississippi Drug Threat Assessment, which is produced by the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics (MBN), identifies the most significant criminal drug activity and drug threats faced by law enforcement and the citizens of this state. As a result of statistical data from drug case production, toxicology reports of overdose deaths, law enforcement, along with its multi-dimensional partnerships including treatment and prevention, Mississippi continues to work to increase public safety and public health throughout its boundaries. This assessment aims to inform law enforcement agencies and legislators of current and potential illicit concerns that exist in our state to assist in the planning of enforcement strategies and effective utilization of available resources for future operations. Moreover, educators, community groups, parents, and others can also use this threat assessment to understand Mississippi's drug threats better. Contributing factors that may enhance access to illicit drugs include geographic location, types of industries, as well as cultural and economic diversities. We hope the information contained in this report is instrumental in the counterdrug initiatives impacting individual communities, the State of Mississippi, and the United States of America.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DRUG THREATS IN MISSISSIPPI

Fentanyl and Other Opioids	Primary drug threat
Methamphetamine	Primary drug threat
Diverted Pharmaceuticals	Primary drug threat
Marijuana	Gateway drug
Cocaine and Crack Cocaine	Constant drug threat
Heroin	Remains a drug threat
New Psychoactive Substances	Continues to increase

The desire of the American public's insistence on substance abuse continues to have an impact on the drug trade nationwide. Government relaxing border crossing restrictions and other measures have increased the availability of illicit drugs, including fentanyl and methamphetamine. Fentanyl, typically in pill form, is being smuggled into the country at an alarming rate. Available data reflects that fentanyl is available throughout the nation, including Mississippi. Mississippi and every other state are experiencing inundating quantities of methamphetamine in every community. Based on the review of toxicology reports, Mississippians are using a variety of substances together, or in close succession, which can have deadly consequences. It isn't uncommon to find a report indicating that an individual had fentanyl, heroin, oxycodone, methamphetamine, alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, various pharmaceuticals, and other substances in blood samples at the time of death. Due to Fentanyl being the most dangerous threat to human life, its presence in drug toxicology reports, local seizures, and nationwide seizures, it is deemed our primary threat. Fentanyl is a huge concern for MBN and its multi-disciplinary partners, which includes health departments, mental health departments, treatment facilities, and other entities. Methamphetamine is the most prevalent drug

encountered and is also listed as a primary drug threat. Pharmaceuticals, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and new psychoactive substances are a continuous concern in Mississippi. Let's look at these drug threats for more information.

Fentanyl and Other Opioids are the most significant threats in Mississippi affecting public safety and public health. With the decrease in availability of prescription opioids and opiates, Mexican Cartels continue flooding the country with fentanyl and other similar substances, whereas quantities of fentanyl continue to escalate in Mississippi. Overdose deaths involving fentanyl, fentanyl combined with heroin, and fentanyl combined with other substances, continue to rise. With fentanyl being pressed into counterfeit pills to imitate commonly abused medications, many Americans are at risk of obtaining and unexpectedly consuming a lethal dose of fentanyl with each dosage unit consumed. In 2022, 62.5% of the suspected overdose deaths, reported to MBN, involved fentanyl. Fentanyl continues to be a priority for law enforcement in Mississippi and across the country. According to the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey, fentanyl and other opioids were deemed the greatest drug threat. The survey also indicated that law enforcement resources will be directed toward fentanyl and other opioids, which can be attributed to the overwhelming number of deaths involving these drugs. Note: Heroin will be discussed in its own section.

Methamphetamine continues to be the biggest drug threat in Mississippi due to its availability, the growth of abuse and continued use, related drug overdoses, and the violent crime it generates. Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) continue to import crystal methamphetamine, or ice, into the United States, and it is the most accessible form of methamphetamine in Mississippi. The transportation and the distribution in Mississippi are most prevalent among African American criminal groups but also includes Hispanics and Caucasians. The use of methamphetamine is essentially used across all demographics. Among the Mississippi respondents of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment's Law Enforcement Survey, methamphetamine was deemed the most prevalent drug associated with violent crime and property crime. Recently, the Mississippi Legislature reversed House Bill 512 (2010), allowing ephedrine/pseudoephedrine, the key ingredient, to be sold without medical providers' prescriptions. Although clandestine methamphetamine labs have remained almost non-existent since 2011, it is anticipated that the number of clandestine methamphetamine labs will remain low due to the Mexican methamphetamine being readily available, low in cost, and high in purity. During 2022, MBN was actively involved in four suspected clandestine methamphetamine labs. However, MBN remains vigilant in preparation for the re-emergence of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories.

Pharmaceutical Drug Diversion is still a primary drug threat in Mississippi. The illicit use of legally available pharmaceutical medications obtained from pharmacies, such as those that help with pain, anxiety, sleep, hyperactivity, and weight loss, remains prevalent. There are individuals and organized groups of individuals who seek to obtain these medications illegally. Due to the increase in technology and collective experience, these criminals exploit the manners in which citizens legally get medicines from pharmacies from simple, time proven methods to manufacturing authentic-looking prescriptions. The most common ways to obtain prescription drugs illegally are through prescription forgeries and "doctor shopping", whereas the medications are from pharmacies with legitimate supply chains. Alternate illegal means to obtain these desired

medications are through the internet, from pharmacies in Mexico, and from non-pharmacies in southwest border towns. These options of obtaining pharmaceuticals are hazardous because the drug is possibly contaminated, expired, counterfeit, or otherwise unsafe. The threat of diverted pharmaceutical medication is enhanced through drug-targeted burglaries and robberies, which add violence into the mix. Healthcare professionals, either criminal or less scrupulous, also impact the availability of these drugs to addicts and criminals. The manufacturers of controlled pharmaceuticals are held to many restrictions that impact the availability of these medications. For example, mandated manufacturer restrictions on quantities produced to the quantities that are allowed to be ordered by wholesale distributors and down to the percentage allowed to be allocated to retail and non-retail pharmacies impact every community. The continued shortage of prescription opioids, as well as, other prescription medications, such as stimulants, is forcing some addicts to turn to the street to obtain prescription medications, which have a higher probability of being laced with fentanyl or other substances and can be deadly.

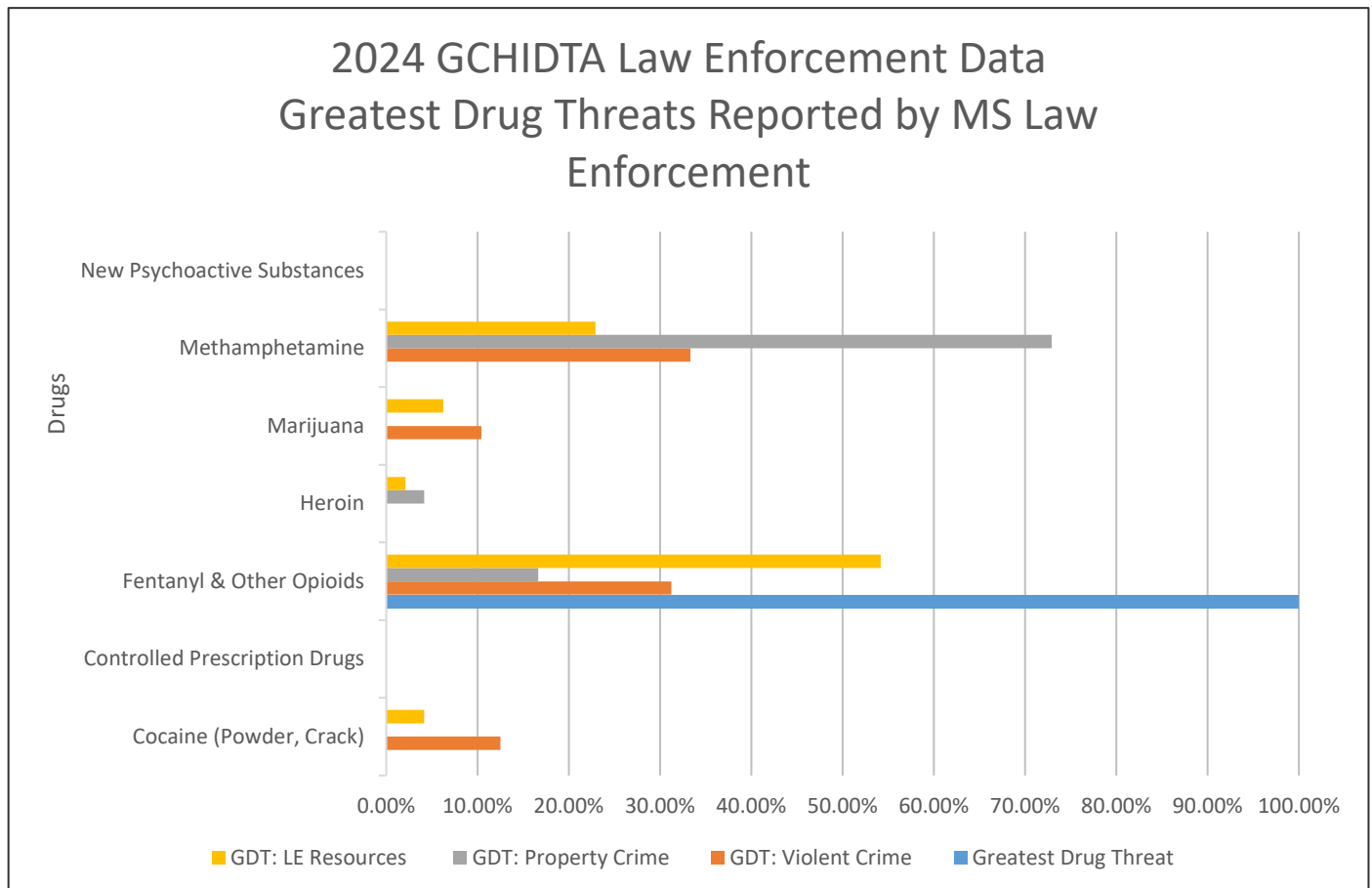
Marijuana continues to be the most abused and widely available drug in Mississippi. Most of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey Mississippi respondents indicated that the availability of marijuana is rated as high. Even as marijuana evolves, it is a direct threat due to the ever-increasing relaxed public perception of its dangers, the legalization of “medical” marijuana in many states, including Mississippi, and the increase in marijuana potency. Illegal THC edibles and vape oils are available and especially desirable among teens and younger adults. THC-infused products and packaging resemble everyday products that are routinely seen in retail stores, such as candy. They are undoubtedly marketed to attract teens and younger children. Not only is Marijuana continuing to be imported from Mexico and diverted from states where production is legal, such as Colorado, California, and Oklahoma. Mississippians can potentially be exposed to wax and hashish, as they are still being seen. Marijuana overdose remains a significant concern due to the increase potency of marijuana and related products. With the legalization of medical marijuana, the impact to the community remains unclear. Recreational use of marijuana remains illegal in Mississippi.

Cocaine remains a drug threat in Mississippi due especially to its high addiction rate, associated violence, and its affiliation with gangs and drug cartels. Powder cocaine and crack cocaine remain available to Mississippians. Most of the cocaine in Mississippi is transported by American and Mexican DTOs via Texas and the Southwest Border states and distributed by criminal groups, street gangs, and independent dealers. The majority of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Survey Mississippi respondents rated the availability of cocaine as moderate to high. It should be noted that approximately 15 one-kilogram bricks of cocaine, suspected to be 33 pounds, washed up on the shores of the Mississippi Gulf Coast in Harrison County during August 2022, believed to have been off-loaded in the Mississippi Sound.

Heroin remains a threat in Mississippi affecting public safety and public health. With the decrease in availability of prescription opioids and opiates, Mexican Cartels continue supplying the country with heroin, whereas heroin quantities continue to be available in Mississippi. A snapshot of availability, MBN initiated cases involving heroin in 24 counties in 2022, which affected eight (8) out of nine (9) districts. In 2022, Mississippi Forensics Laboratory analyzed exhibits containing heroin from 27 out of 82 counties, just over 32% of Mississippi counties. Overdose deaths involving heroin, heroin combined with fentanyl, and heroin combined with

other substances, continue to be a reality. In 2022, 10% of the suspected overdose deaths, reported to MBN, involved heroin. Heroin cannot be overlooked and must remain a focus for law enforcement in Mississippi and across the country. Even though not included in the category with fentanyl and other opioids in the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey, heroin is always on deck as a threat. According to DEA, the production of heroin may be experiencing a decrease, the border is not noticing the same trend. Likewise, survey respondents recognize the significance of heroin during the fentanyl and opioid epidemic. Heroin may be the second fiddle today but could be first chair to addicts tomorrow to avoid the terrible withdrawal symptoms related to opiate and opioid dependence.

New Psychoactive Substances continue to be a growing concern in Mississippi. These “designer drugs” are created to circumvent legal perimeters and usually mimic the effects of methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, and other substances. According to the DEA, these substances don’t have any legitimate industrial or medical use and they are a threat to public health and safety. They are just as addictive and devastating as commonly known drugs of abuse. They are available on the internet, gas stations, smoke shops and other outlets and are typically marketed toward young adults. One of the most troubling aspects of these new psychoactive substances is the limited knowledge of the content and potency of the substance being consumed.

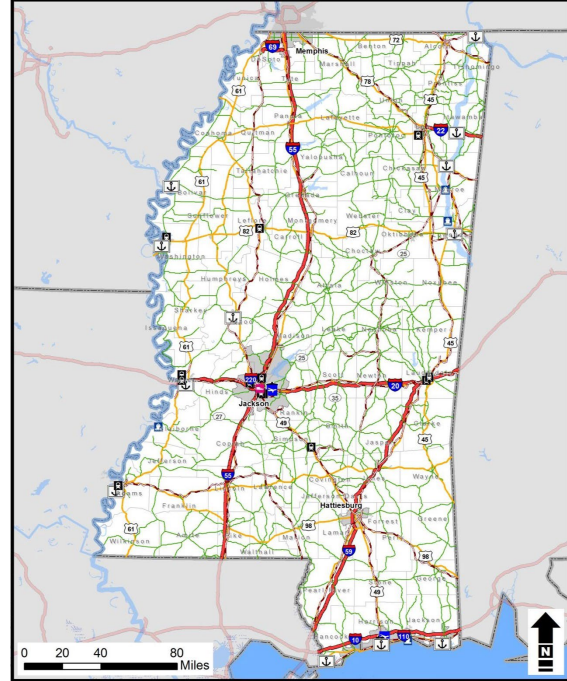


Key Findings From 2024 Drug Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey; Source: Gulf Coast HIDTA

III. ENVIRONMENTAL AND RELATED THREATS

GEOGRAPHY

The transportation of illegal drugs into and through Mississippi continues to be a significant problem for law enforcement. The state is comprised of 82 counties, located within 47,233 square miles, with its economy supported by agricultural and manufacturing industries. It's essential to mention, Mississippi lies within 500 miles of more than 115 million consumers and 136 major metropolitan areas. The state is ideally suited with its interstate system, deep water and river ports, air and rail systems to facilitate drug movement from the south Texas/Mexico area and Gulf ports to the entire Midwest and Eastern United States. Mississippi is nestled in between Louisiana and Alabama with direct access to the Gulf of Mexico, which offers 62 miles of coastline. The coastline accommodates deep water ports in the Gulf, access to major rivers and river ports, and smaller navigable inland waterways that may be utilized by commercial and private vessels. By land, Mississippi has an elaborate system of interstate highways, highways, and roadways that are the veins of life for travel and the transportation of lawful and illicit commodities.



Source: Mississippi Department of Transportation

As the map illustrates, these highways and major thoroughfares provide multiple routes which allow for quick and easy travel across the state and beyond. Like other states in the Union, Mississippi has commercial bus lines that service the state and beyond. Additionally, freight and passenger rail systems are utilized to transport commodities. In Mississippi alone, primary rail carriers, including the Illinois Central Railroad, Kansas City Southern, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company, Norfolk Southern System, and numerous local rail companies utilize nearly 2,500 miles of train track to move a variety of commodities. Additionally, Amtrak passenger service to and from New Orleans, Louisiana to Chicago, Illinois transits the entire state with major stops in-state. Amtrak also has a line that runs from New Orleans, Louisiana to New York City, New York. As it's capitol has been referred, Mississippi is the "Crossroads of the South" due to its numerous avenues for criminal organizations to facilitate drug movement on land, in water, and through the air in Mississippi and beyond to the corners of the United States. Due to a many reasons, highway transportation remains the number one method illicit substances are transported into, thru, and around Mississippi. However, American Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and Transnational Criminals Organizations (TCOs) utilize all available land, water, and air resources to increase the likelihood that more illegal drugs flood the streets in every community than the quantities that are intercepted by law enforcement at any given point in time.

HIGHWAY INTERDICTION IN MISSISSIPPI



Source: www.wlox.com

The Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, referred to as the Interstate Highways System and other United States and state highways provide multiple routes for drug couriers to travel in, around, and through the state to avoid detection by law enforcement. Due to the interconnection and multiple access points to these highways, circumvent weigh stations primarily situated along the Interstate Highways System. Most drugs

transit the state eastbound and northbound, originating in source areas of the Southwest Border and the West Coast. Currency and other forms of proceeds normally move across the state in a westbound direction, destined for the drug source areas.

On July 1, 2020, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was essentially replaced with the United States – Mexico – Canada Agreement (USMCA), which is a mutually beneficial win for North American workers, farmers, ranchers, and businesses. According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative, this agreement continues to create a more balanced, reciprocal trade supporting higher paying jobs for Americans and allows for growth in the North American economy. Like NAFTA, USMCA allows trade and traffic with Mexico and Canada to flourish. Due to the sheer volume of commodities crossing international borders, the opportunities to smuggle drugs from Mexico and Canada have increased and will continue to increase. This trade agreement with our neighbors to the south significantly impacts Mississippi.

Interstate highways, U.S. Highways, and state highways provide multiple routes for drug couriers to navigate across the country undetected. However, the path of least resistance remains the Interstate Highway System, which offers unrestrained access for movement through the country, including Mississippi. Furthermore, drug trafficking patterns indicate the Interstate Highway System is the preferred method of transporting illegal drugs into and through Mississippi. Mississippi has five major interstates and nine major highways. Law enforcement officials actively patrol these roadways. In addition, an increasing number of departments have personnel specifically assigned to intercept drug smugglers and criminal activity. Budgetary concerns and resource availability impair a full-scale effort to intercept drug shipments on Mississippi highways.



Top image: Interstate 10; Bottom image: Interstate 20;
Right image: Interstate 55; Sources: Google (top and bottom); Wikimedia.org (right)

Significant quantities of illicit cargo, such as Methamphetamine, Heroin, Cocaine, and Marijuana cross into the United States along the southern border and transit into and through Mississippi. Law enforcement continues to actively pursue the detection of drug smuggling organizations operating in Mississippi. According to the Blue Lightning Operations Center (BLOC)/Gulf Coast High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Watch Center, there were 108 drug and 53 currency related incidents reported on Mississippi highways during 2022. All major highways in Mississippi were included in these incidents. Mississippi cross-designated officers made 57 seizures of marijuana totaling 961 pounds; 25 seizures of cocaine totaling 440 pounds; seven (7) seizures of methamphetamine totaling 162 pounds; four (4) seizures of heroin totaling 40 pounds; nine (9) seizures of THC products totaling three (3) pounds and 13,911 dosage units; 63 currency seizures totaling \$5,433,679.00 in U.S. Currency. There were 108 drug seizures; 23 vehicle seizures; 42 weapons seizures and 121 arrests. During these efforts, 58 undocumented aliens were encountered, whereas nine (9) were arrested. As a result of these stops, many targets were identified, and active investigations were conducted. Some of the investigations have already resulted in the identification and arrests of numerous members of known DTOs.

Interstate	Cocaine	Marijuana	Methamphetamine	Heroin	Fentanyl	Currency Seized
I-10	135.60 Pounds	114.74 Pounds	100.06 Pounds	N/A	N/A	\$1,480,208
I-20	282.03 Pounds	76.60 Pounds	25.00 Pounds	N/A	12 Pounds	\$2,661,740
I-55	1.15 Pounds	10.02 Pounds	0.003 Pound	N/A	N/A	\$0
I-59	24.20 Pounds	0.001 Pound	N/A	30.80 Pounds*	N/A	\$710,680
I-22	0.001 Pound	586.10 Pounds	46.02 Pounds	N/A	N/A	\$292,125

Mississippi Seizures by Interstate Highways; Source: BLOC/Gulf Coast HIDTA

*Fentanyl present

The five major interstates that connect Mississippi to major metropolitan areas in the U.S. are:

- I-55 stretches the entire length of the state offering a straight route from the Gulf Coast to Chicago, Illinois and other northeastern cities with high demands for illegal drugs.
- I-20 runs the width of the state providing an easy route from the West Coast drug-producing cities to the East Coast, which gives traffickers access to Dallas, Birmingham, Atlanta, and other major drug distribution areas in the southeast and the eastern seaboard.
- I-55 and I-20 intersect in Jackson providing many transportation possibilities to drug traffickers.
- I-59 joins I-20 in Meridian and intersects I-10 in Louisiana.
- I-10 follows the coastal area of Mississippi giving traffickers access to Mobile, New Orleans, Houston, Miami, and other major drug distribution areas in the southeast.
- I-22, formerly United States Highway 78, runs in a southeasterly direction across North Mississippi and Alabama which connects I-269, which is 25 miles from downtown Memphis, Tennessee, to I-65 in Birmingham, Alabama.

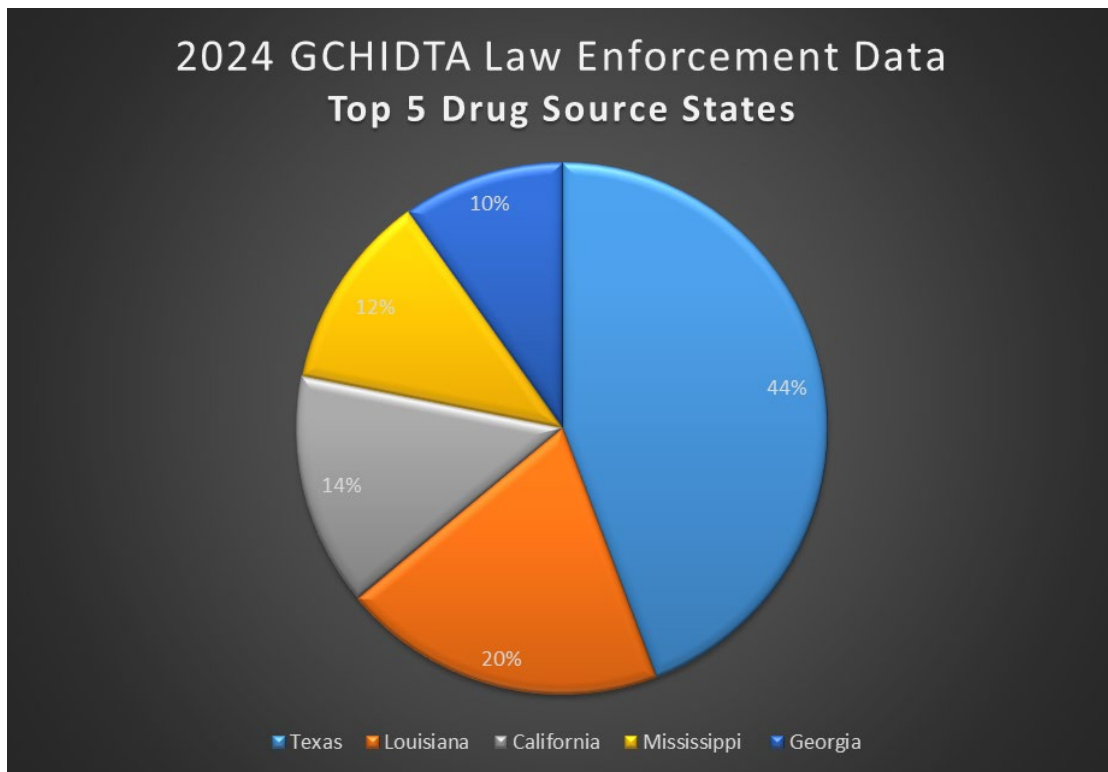
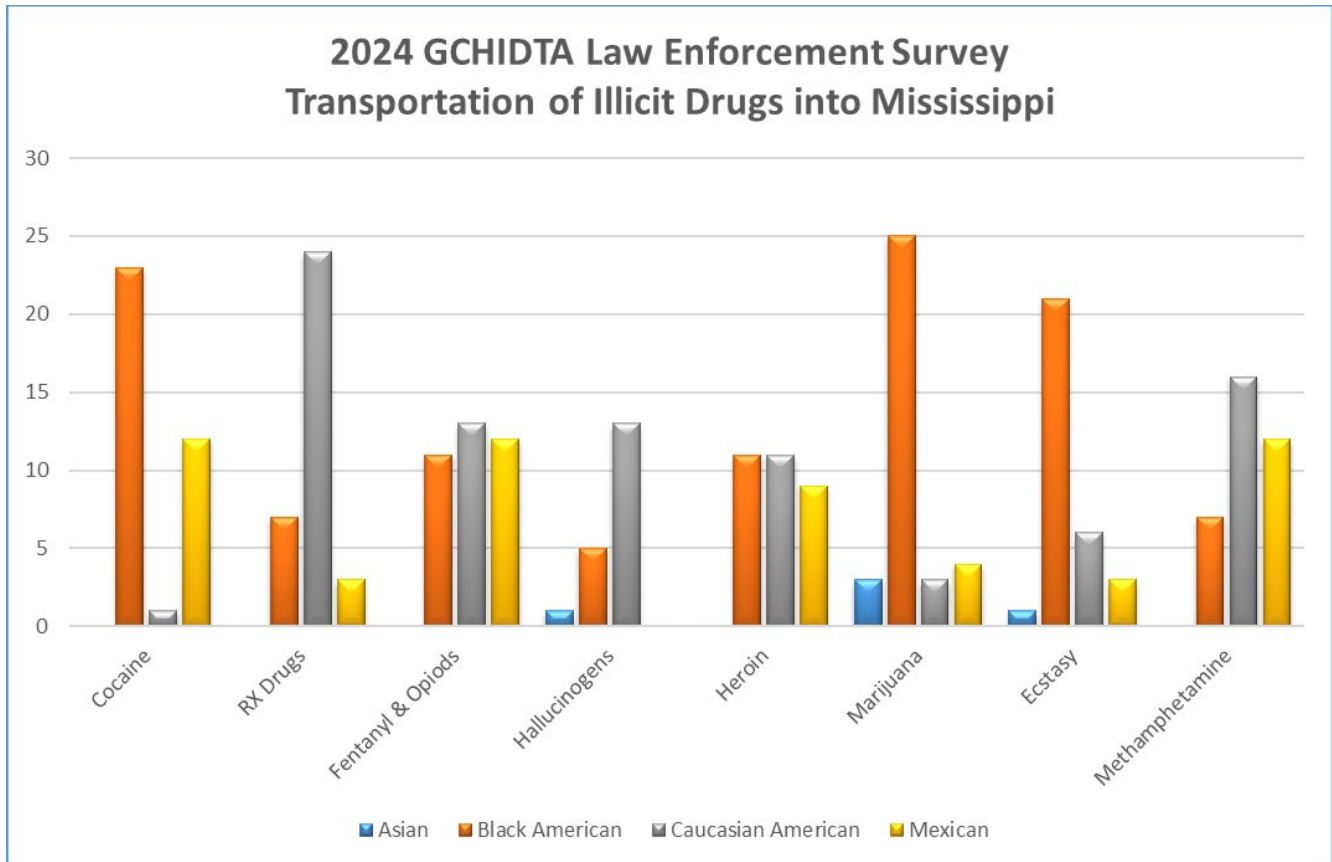
- I-69, also called the “NAFTA Superhighway”, is proposed to run from Texas to Michigan to help trade with Mexico and Canada. Currently, a portion runs through Mississippi at the Tunica and De Soto County line along MS 713 near Tunica, along a rural route to I-55 at the south end of I-239 near Hernando. The route runs concurrently with I-55 to Memphis.

In addition to the convenience of interstates, Mississippi also has numerous state highways that provide drug traffickers with a variety of avenues of approach to their target areas. State highways 51, 61, 45 and 49 run north/south, and highways 6, 26, 72, 78, 80, 82, 84, 90 and 98 run east/west. These highways intersect the interstates and permit additional opportunities for drug traffickers to transport their drugs undetected.

Highway	Cocaine	Marijuana	Methamphetamine	Heroin	Currency Seized
US 45	0.31 Pound	N/A	N/A	0.69 Pound	\$10,794
US 49	N/A	39.00 Pounds	N/A	N/A	\$57,060
US 61	0.12 Pound	0.008 Pound	N/A	N/A	\$0
US 82	N/A	6.40 Pounds	N/A	N/A	\$0
US 82	N/A	3.00 Pounds	N/A	N/A	\$2,500

Mississippi Seizures by US and State Highways; Source: BLOC/Gulf Coast HIDTA

The United States Department of Transportation (DOT) requires that all trucking company names are displayed on the door of the tractor. Due to this regulation, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that some traffickers create trucking firms or companies for the purpose of appearing to comply with these regulations. Realistically, only one or two shipments of drugs are made under the company name before it is discarded or replaced with another. This practice prevents any chance of name recognition by law enforcement. DOT estimates that only half of the tractor-trailers from which drug seizures are made are legitimate trucking companies. Common practices among traffickers are to alter or use someone else's DOT numbers and for drivers to use false documentation and identification. Mississippi is the home of several drug trafficking organizations that utilize trucking companies as independent drug transporters catering to key cities. Intelligence reveals that numerous Mississippi trucking companies are the major transporters of assets for several DTOs in the state. Intelligence is also indicative of drug trafficking organizations owning and operating independent trucking companies for the purpose of transporting drugs, laundering monetary assets, and providing an apparent legitimate gainful employment. Mississippi is also the home of a major international poultry industry and lumber industry that transports commodities via local independent commercial truck lines all over the United States. These companies may or may not be independent from the drug trafficking organizations - essentially, hauling the drugs into the state and charging transportation fees. This practice attempts to shield the organization from the shipment of drugs, if discovered.



Key Findings From 2024 Drug Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey; Source: Gulf Coast HIDTA

DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the United States Census Bureau, as of 2022, the population of Mississippi is estimated to be 2.94 million. Mississippi currently has a population growth rate of - 0.7%. The population of the state of Mississippi consists of about 51.3% of the population being female, while 48.7% were male. Likewise, 58.8% of the population is white and 38% of the population is black or African American. Overall, the Mexican population in Mississippi is steadily growing. The Hispanic or Latino population in Mississippi makes up 3.5%. Those that identify as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islanders, and those that identify as two or more races only make up about 1.8% of the population in Mississippi.

Jackson, the capital city, is the only one in the state with a population of over 100,000. Only two other cities currently have a population of at least 50,000: Gulfport and Southaven. The most populated counties are Hinds (239,479 - but has been losing population since 2010), Harrison (205,027), and DeSoto (178,751) counties. Both Harrison and DeSoto counties have a substantial growth rate of over 9% in each county. Situated in the southeastern portion of the United States, Mississippi is the 32nd largest state in the country with an area that covers 48,430 square miles. Population figures are consistent with their size. It is the 34th most populous state of the United States, as reported by PopulationU.com.

According to the United States Census Bureau, between 2017 and 2021, the median household income for Mississippi was \$48,716 and the average household income is \$69,717. The per capita income was \$26,807. 52.5% of Mississippians are employed based on 2021 data and the national average is 58.6%. 24.8% of Mississippians have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, whereas the national average is 35%. Now that we have looked the demographics, including the average household income, employment rate, and higher education, let's look at Mississippi's economics.

ECONOMICS

The State of Mississippi, like other states in the Union, is still experiencing the economic impacts brought about by Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Businesses and industry, particularly those with interpersonal contact, are affected by the slow return of the workforce following the government shutdown to slow the spread of this virus. Although everyone is open for business and job opportunities are plentiful, maintaining operations continues to be a problem due to lack of interest by eligible workforce candidates to return to work. Educational services, healthcare, and social assistance make up approximately 24.7% of the state's workforce. Government employees make up 18.5% of the state's workforce, whereas the national average is 14.6%. Agriculture employs approximately 17.4% of the state's workforce, directly or indirectly. Manufacturing (12.9%) and Retail Trade (11.7%) follow these three categories. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the unemployment rate for Mississippi was 4.0% for December 2022 compared to a national rate of 3.5% for the same period. According to Mississippi Department of Employment Security, Jefferson County has the highest unemployment rate at 11.7% and the state's average is 3.4%.

Mississippi is currently ranked 27th in the United States for its economic outlook. This is a forward-looking forecast based on the state's standing (equal-weighted average) in 15 important state policy variables. Data reflect state and local rates and revenues and any effect of federal deductibility, per the website. This figure was obtained from Rich States, Poor States website.

As of December 2022, Agriculture is a 9.72-billion-dollar industry that positively affects Mississippi's economy and is the state's number one industry. Mississippi's fertile soil and temperate climate make it an ideal state for agriculture as the number above indicates. Agriculture makes a significant contribution to all 82 counties. The average size farm is composed of 300 acres. Mississippi's farmers utilize almost 10.4 million acres encompassing 34,700 farms in the state. The top seven agricultural crops in Mississippi are poultry/eggs, soybeans, forestry, corn, cotton, cattle/calves, and catfish. Agriculture is still a major component of Mississippi's economy.

In the past 50 years, Mississippi has diversified its economy by concentrating more heavily on industrial activities, attracting a broader spectrum of business, industrial and technical operations, and entertainment. The space shuttles' main engines are test-fired at the Stennis Space Center in Hancock County, and Peavey Electronics in Meridian leads the world in the manufacture of musical amplification. According to IBIS World, the top ten largest companies by employment in Mississippi are: Walmart (25,732); State of Mississippi (25,000); Toyota Motor Corporation (8,700); North Mississippi Health Services (7,200); Nissan Motor Company, Limited (6,000); Sanderson Farms, Incorporated (4,643); and Milwaukee Electric Tool Corporation (4,400); University of Mississippi (3,500); Amazon.com, Incorporated (3,500); and The Home Depot, Incorporated (3,070). Mississippi has a variety of industries located throughout the state which positively impacts the economy. Mississippi is currently home to 29 licensed casinos operating the state, which employ about 37,722 people. Mississippi also has three casinos, which are run by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and are not subject to state gaming regulations. Mississippi also established the lottery, which is another means to positively impact the economy. According to www.mslotteryhome.com, there are 1,880 locations where you can purchase lottery tickets in the state of Mississippi.

Based on the state's work force market, the average level of education, and the availability of illicit drugs, many Mississippians choose to engage in unlawful drug activity, albeit single substance users, poly-substance users, small level drug dealers, mid-level distributors, and up to top-tier distributors.

IV. MISSISSIPPI DRUG THREATS



Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022. Source: www.wapt.com

OVERALL SCOPE OF DRUG THREATS

Fentanyl is considered the greatest drug threat across Mississippi due to its potency and its properties to be presented as a powder, pressed into pills, or otherwise presented as a candy-like substance. It is commonly mixed with other substances, substituted for related substances, or manufactured to imitate legitimate pharmaceutical medications, such as Xanax, Adderall, or “Oxycontin”. As Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) continue to increase the quantities of Fentanyl being smuggled into the country, Mississippi and the United States will continue to make significant seizures as well as see an increase in the number of fentanyl related overdoses. Methamphetamine remains a significant threat in Mississippi because communities are inundated with enormous quantities readily available for distribution. Additionally, methamphetamine, or ice, is routinely 95% pure or higher in end-user quantities. Methamphetamine is flooding this state and country and requires many resources to combat the drug trafficking organizations responsible for smuggling it across the international border and across the country. With the influx, drug traffickers associated with its distribution have a propensity toward violent crimes, property crimes, and require law enforcement resources to mitigate the associated criminal activity. Pharmaceuticals, or prescription drugs, are still a major threat due to the popular belief that these medications are safe. This belief has been reinforced by the notion that medications are manufactured in authorized facilities, legally prescribed, and lawfully dispensed. However, prescription drugs, particularly opioids and other controlled medications, contribute to addiction and the lack of availability of these pharmaceuticals through legal channels exacerbate the known issues. When addiction sets in, the absence of the substance causes withdrawal symptoms. When

lawful quantities of these medications aren't available, drug addicts seek to find these prescription medications on the street. This creates the opportunity for heroin to re-emerge, which it has done. It also opens the door for the presence of counterfeit drugs, where illicit laboratories produce pills and capsules that appear to be the same as the desired medications being made legally. These dosage units can contain some or none of the suspected substance. Through this trend, fentanyl emerged on the scene. Marijuana continues to be widely abused in Mississippi. It is seen as a continuous threat, particularly with medical marijuana beginning to be dispensed. Marijuana is being produced with ever-increasing THC potency. It is combined with THC-infused products that target and attracts a wider variety of society. When blended with a generalized acceptance of marijuana by the general public, young adults, adolescents, and younger juveniles are more prone to abuse it. Cocaine, particularly crack cocaine, continues to be a major drug threat to our state due to the violence and the dangerous gangs associated with the trafficking of this street drug. Heroin has been and continues to be biding time to re-emerge as a primary threat to fill the voids created by the current opioid epidemic. Abuse of synthetic drugs such as Spice and bath salts is a constant battle for law enforcement, with new synthetic drugs being developed continually. There has also been an influx of synthetic cannabinoids due to "CBD oil" being sold in local vape shops. Vape cartridges, especially those purchased in the black market, have sometimes been found to be falsely labeled and contain dangerous additives and contaminants. Legal and illicit drugs continue to significantly threaten the quality of life that is attainable for Mississippi residents and tourists alike. Our society's issues require a unified approach to mitigate drug abuse's devastating and long-lasting impacts on humankind.

FENTANYL AND OTHER OPIOIDS

ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT

Fentanyl and other opioids are significant threats and major concerns to law enforcement officers in Mississippi due to the propensity for addiction and the increasing number of fentanyl and opioid-related overdose deaths. In addition to law enforcement, topics directly related to fentanyl and other opioids are overarching priorities for health departments, mental health agencies, treatment networks, outreach organizations, and other entities attempting to curb the number of overdoses the United States continues to experience. Fentanyl continues to be present in the media as well as topics of discussion among individuals who hold positions of authority at local, state, and national levels.



Seized in Grenada County, MS in 2022.



Seized in Yalobusha County, MS in 2022.

Fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, is roughly 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin as an analgesic, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. As a laboratory made substance, its supply is not limited by the quantity that can be grown in given grow season, such as the opium poppy plant. According to published literature from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a lethal dose may be as small as two milligrams, which is estimated to be comparable to 15 to 20 granulates of salt (lower right image). In Mississippi, fentanyl has been found in powder form, pressed into non-descript pills (left image), pressed into pills that appear to be legitimate pharmaceutical medications (top right image), as well as, placed into capsules.

Initially, fentanyl was believed to be a cutting agent or an adulterant that was added to other street drugs to stretch the product or enhance the effects, but this doesn't seem to be entirely accurate. The primary reason for using drugs is to get "high", so abusers want the "best" high, or the maximum desired effect possible. Due to their exposure to fentanyl, abusers seek to repeat, or scientifically speaking, attempt to achieve a previous experience. Due in part to this reason, fentanyl continues to increase in popularity and availability.



Lethal Dose of Fentanyl compared to that of Heroin.
Source: www.nist.gov

Consistent with available data pertaining to fentanyl seizures, the presence of fentanyl is increasing while the presence of heroin is decreasing. Mississippi law enforcement officers are encountering fentanyl as powders and pressed pills, commonly identified as a round, blue pill marked M/30 (top right image on Page 15) and round, pastel-colored pills also marked M/30. According to data gathered from the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory (MFL), analysis during the 2022 calendar year* revealed that substances containing fentanyl, fentanyl mixed with other substances, or fentanyl derivatives and precursors have been submitted to the state laboratory from 52 of 82 counties (Note: * - the evidence, or exhibit, may have been submitted for analysis during a previous calendar year). In 2022, Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Agents conducted 66 investigations involving fentanyl. According to the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey, one hundred percent (100%) of the Mississippi respondents identified fentanyl and other opioids as the greatest drug threat. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Treatment and Prevention Survey Mississippi respondents also deemed fentanyl and other opioids as the greatest threat. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the law enforcement survey Mississippi respondents indicated that law enforcement resources will be prioritized toward fentanyl and other opioids, which can be attributed to the overwhelming number of deaths involving these drugs. MBN concurs with fentanyl and other opioids being the greatest threat in Mississippi.

To understand the complexity of today's fentanyl and opioid epidemic, let's look at some underlying contributors. Dedicated drug investigators, particularly those who have experience in investigating pharmaceutical drug diversion crimes, can elaborate and set the stage for how the United States, including Mississippi, arrived at the deadly intersection of authentic pill or counterfeit pill: is this one lethal? In a nutshell, Americans have been taught that prescription medications must be safe because they are manufactured in a sterile environment, prescribed by a highly educated medical provider, dispensed by a licensed pharmacist, and should work as the manufacturer purported to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) when vying for approval. Mix this ideology with the hospitals recommendation that pain be assessed in all patients, leading to pain being the fifth vital, or fifth vital sign. This idea caught on around 1995 and essentially the pain scale was born. According to the National Institutes of Health, the Veterans Health Organization, and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, now simply referred to as The Joint Commission, recommended that pain needed to be assessed. From available data, the use of opioids significantly increased over approximately 10 years. Around 2005-2008, the number of Americans being treated with opioids based on the patient's self-assessment in a healthcare setting almost doubled from before the idea's introduction in 1995. Professionals from multiple disciplines agree that addiction can begin merely with using a substance once, depending on genetic and family history. Based on the implementation of the fifth vital and pain scale, more Americans are using opioids, some of whom are becoming addicted to this class of drugs. Additionally, medical providers would direct patients to take the medication as prescribed, even if not currently in pain, so that the pain would be managed before its onset and prior to the current dose wearing off. Around 2016, DEA announced a reduction in the amount of opioid controlled substances that will be allowed to be manufactured in 2017. Prior to this, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) had been providing guidelines recommending a reduction of prescribed opioids. Similarly, DEA and other government agencies continued educating practitioners, pharmacists, manufacturers, and the public about the potential dangers of the misuse of opioid medications.

During this time, more Americans are being prescribed and treated with various opioid medications. At the very least, using the medication as prescribed would likely produce physical and psychological dependence in some patients. As the quantity of opioids decreases, the ripple effect is felt with wholesale distributors down to the retail and in-house pharmacies. The stage has been set for the perfect storm. Patients, who can't receive their medications pursuant to a valid prescription because of the mandated reduction in production, turn to the streets looking for their medication, by appearance such as color, shape, and markings. Individuals may get legitimate pharmaceutical medications as sought and intended from illicit sources, or obtain counterfeit medications bearing the same shape, color, and markings. For others, the abuse started from illicit access to the pain medications, in which it has never been prescribed for a legitimate medical condition. Two different beginnings, but the end results are very, very similar: the abuser becomes a drug addict and one pill away from being a lethal overdose statistic.

In addition to the illicitly produced and distributed “street dope,” drug abusers have access to lawfully manufactured fentanyl which will be discussed in the pharmaceutical diversion section, such as transdermal patches diverted into the illicit market primarily by patients who choose to sell it illegally. Because fentanyl is inexpensive and readily available, cartels have expanded its use beyond a cutting agent for heroin and other opioids to further profits. Not only is fentanyl being added to non-opioid street drugs, but also pressed into pills and encapsulated. Most of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey Mississippi respondents reported that the availability of fentanyl and other opioids have increased in the past year. Almost all said the demand has either stayed the same or increased.



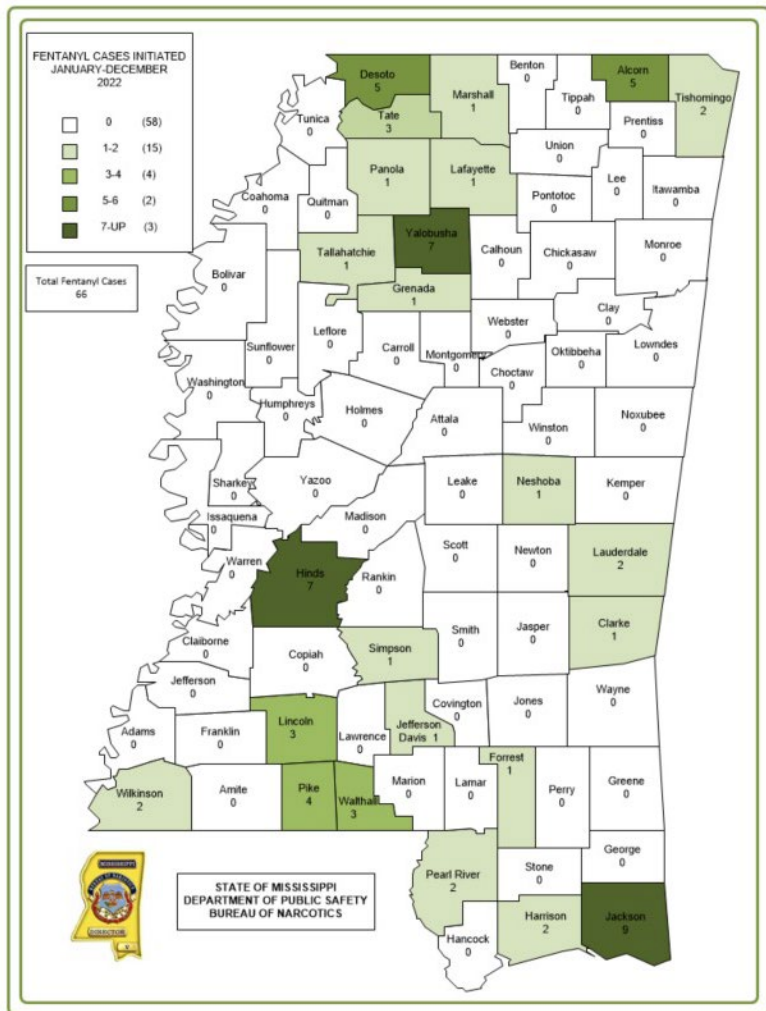
Seized in Neshoba County, MS in 2022.

With the decreased availability of prescription opiates and the Mexican Cartels flooding the states with fentanyl has brought this powerful synthetic substance to the forefront in Mississippi. Mississippi per capita is one of the most over prescribed states for opioids and opiates. As a result, citizens are becoming addicted to opioids and opiates at a higher rate and inevitability transitioning to fentanyl. Today, fentanyl and other opioids are having devastating effects on society. Illicit fentanyl seizures are plastered on various media platforms, but fake pills remain nationally, regionally, and locally available. Drug abusers specifically seek products containing fentanyl, which could include a lethal dose when administered and is equivalent to Russian Roulette. This adds a new dimension for law enforcement, other first responders, and overdose strategy response initiatives to navigate and mitigate the deadly consequences.

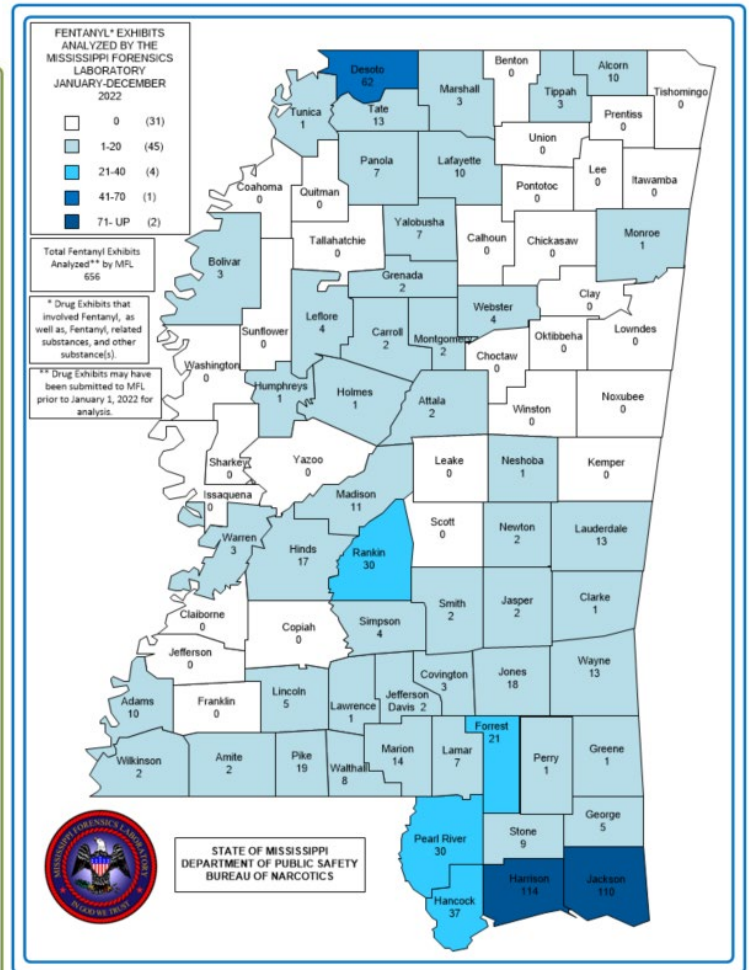
ABUSE

The use of fentanyl continues to be increasing, due in part to the shortage of prescription opiates and opioids, as well as the desire of the abuser to crave the effects of this specific drug. To provide a framework of fentanyl abuse, let's look at cases initiated and arrests by MBN, fentanyl analyzed by the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory, Mississippi Department of Mental Health treatment statistics, and related overdose deaths. In 2022, Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics initiated 66 investigations involving fentanyl, compared to 39 cases in 2021, 19 cases in 2020, 14 cases in

2019, and 12 cases in 2018. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of fentanyl cases increased 69%, which is statistically significant.



MBN Fentanyl Cases Initiated During 2022

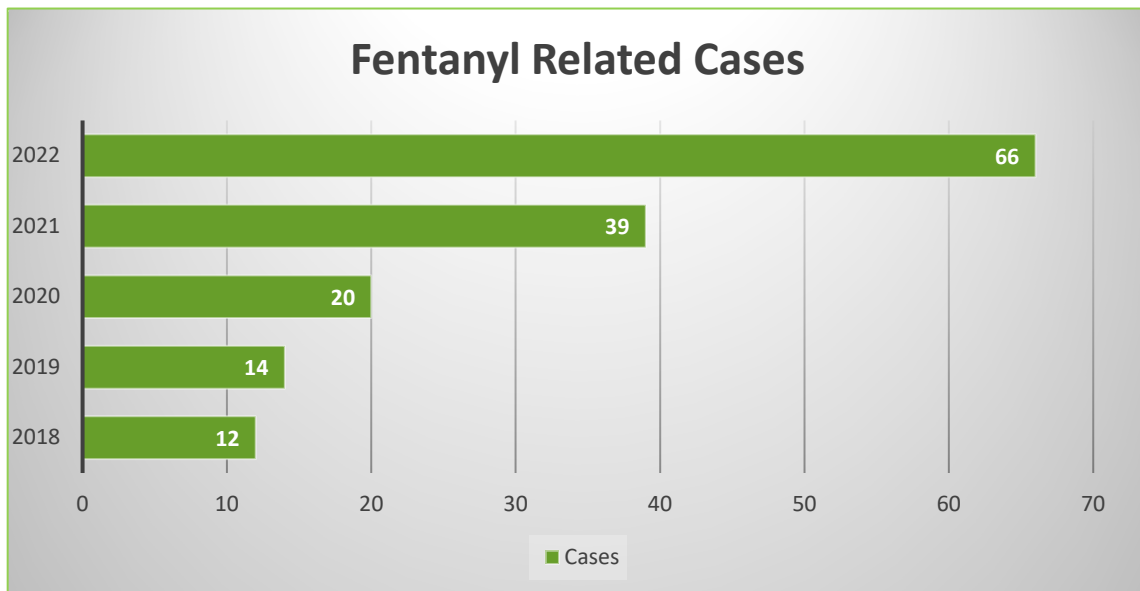


MFL Fentanyl Exhibits Analyzed During 2022

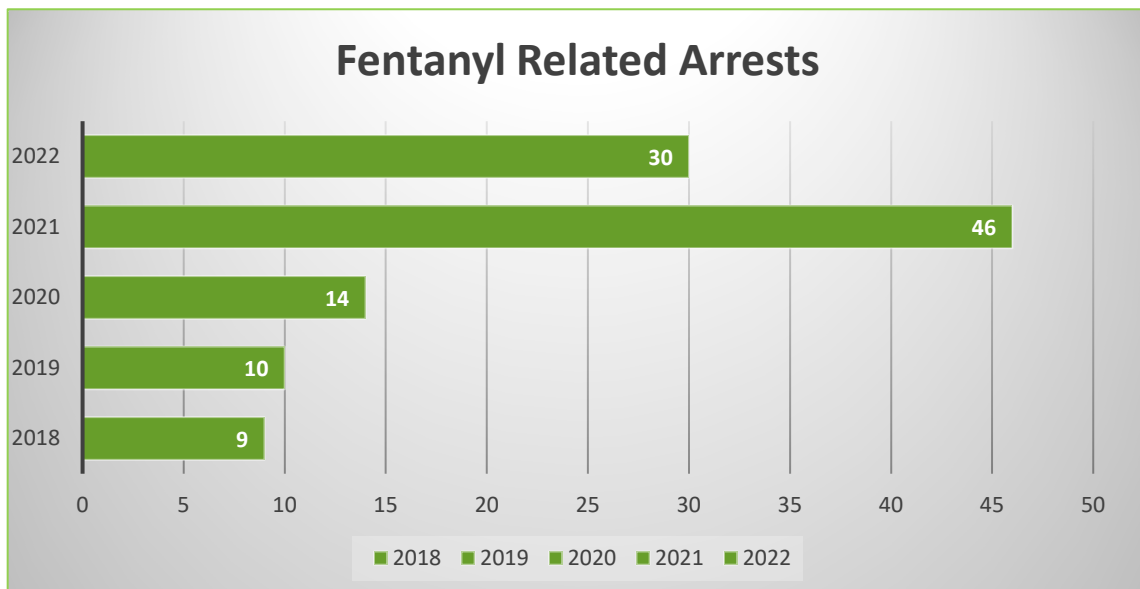
Additionally, the number of cases initiated by MBN skyrocketed between 2018 through 2022, resulting in a 560% increase. Thirty (30) arrests were made by MBN for fentanyl related charges including sale and possession during 2022. The Mississippi Forensics Laboratory analyzed 656 cases during calendar year 2022, which may have been submitted for drug analysis prior to 2022. As depicted by the maps, fentanyl is known to be present in most of Mississippi's counties.

According to MBN data, fentanyl was encountered by MBN Agents in 27 counties; However, Mississippi Forensics Laboratory data reflects that fentanyl has been present in 52 of 82 counties, as recorded through analyzed exhibits during 2022. Mississippi law enforcement has seized quantities in individual cases in the amounts of less than one (1) gram of powder to at least 2,422 grams (about 5.34 pounds) of powder during 2022. Similarly, Mississippi law enforcement has seized quantities in individual investigations from one (1) dosage unit to at least 22,078 dosage

units in 2022. Abuse may be related to availability and costs, whereas one-half gram ($\frac{1}{2}$) quantities are being sold for approximately one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00) and ounce quantities are being sold for approximately \$1,400.00 each. Drug prices vary across the state for a variety of reasons, such as supply and demand, whereas the prices are consistent with reliable information pertaining to at least one geographic region of Mississippi.



MBN Initiated Fentanyl Related Cases From 2018-2022



MBN Fentanyl Related Arrest Comparison From 2018-2022



Seized in Tallahatchie County, MS in 2022.

With fentanyl being very potent, a non-lethal or lethal overdose is highly possible during intended and unintended use of the substance. For reference, review the photograph on Page 15 depicting the lethal dose of heroin (30 milligrams) and the lethal dose of fentanyl (3 milligrams). Fentanyl is a primary factor in overdose deaths, whereas roughly 59% of the reported fatal drug overdose deaths involved fentanyl in 2022. Not included, but it is anticipated that Emergency Medical Services (EMS) related calls for non-lethal overdoses would be in the lower thousands range and Emergency Departments (ED) encounters for non-lethal overdoses would exceed two or three times the number of EMS calls for service. Due to these reasons, treatment professionals know that opiate and opioid addiction is a massive struggle for addicts.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA), under the purview of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, believe in the “whole patient” approach to treat substance abuse disorders. This approach focuses on medical assisted therapy (MAP), counseling, and behavioral therapies. The Mississippi Department of Mental Health reported 476 people sought treatment for “other opiates and synthetics” as their primary substance from January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2022, excluding heroin. About 60%, or 287 individuals between 26-45 years old, were admitted for other opiates and synthetics substance abuse. Almost 36% of the remaining population (19-25 age group and 46-65 age group) reported other opiates and synthetics as their primary drug. The secondary treatment data revealed that 180 patients were admitted for treatment and declared “other opiates and synthetics” as their secondary drug problem. Of these patients, 114 of them were between 26-45 years old. Twenty-six (26) individuals were between the ages of 19-25 and 34 individuals were between 46-65 years old. The tertiary substance, or third in order, followed the same pattern with the majority being between the ages of 26-45.

AVAILABILITY

Fentanyl, like methamphetamine as will be discussed, is readily available in most, if not all, communities in the United States. The Mexican drug cartels, primarily the Sinaloa Drug Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), dominate the wholesale distribution of fentanyl, and other drugs, in the United States. National, regional, and/or local drug trafficking organizations are intricately involved in the distribution of illicit fentanyl. As previously mentioned, fentanyl is gaining popularity and is abundant in supply. Fentanyl is primarily found in counterfeit pressed pills, or dosage units, but powder form is also gaining popularity. According to the DEA, over 20 million (20,000,000) dosage units of fentanyl were seized in 2021. In March 2023, DEA reported that over 57 million (57,000,000) dosage units of fentanyl-laced, fake pills and over 13,000 pounds of fentanyl powder were seized during the 2022 calendar year. DEA estimated this quantity to equate to more than 410 million lethal doses, which could exceed killing every American. With this increase in illicit fentanyl, DEA laboratory testing revealed that six out of ten fentanyl-laced, fake pills contained a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl, which is an increase from four out of ten fake pills containing a lethal dose in 2021. Fentanyl-laced, fake pills and fentanyl powder pose a real danger to public safety and public health in Mississippi, not only to

include first responders, but also the public at large. The United States Custom and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations seized nearly 15,000 pounds of fentanyl during fiscal year (FY) 2022 (October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021). In comparison, CBP seized over 11,000 pounds of fentanyl in FY 2021 and approximately 4,800 pounds in FY 2020. This does not include fentanyl analogues or other synthetic opioids that are not from the fentanyl class. According to the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Law Enforcement Survey, Mississippi respondents overwhelmingly identified the drug trafficking attributes of fentanyl, to include availability, demand, distribution, and transportation have increased across the board. This coincides with the overall influx of fentanyl being available in Mississippi. Even though Mississippi isn't reporting record breaking seizures, law enforcement agencies in Mississippi are dealing with fentanyl, in powder and pressed pill formulations. Essentially, all Mississippi respondents expressed increased fentanyl encountered since January 1, 2022. Similarly, many of the Mississippi respondents indicated that drug availability is high, with a few claiming the availability as moderate.



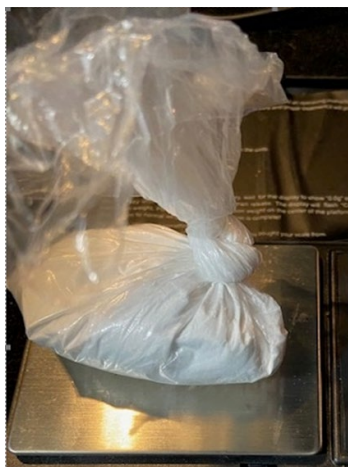
Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.

ASSOCIATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Crime and violence are attributed to drug use and drug distribution. While looking specifically at fentanyl, this product is readily available with high dividends for drug distributors. Combine high profits with high risks equals firearms being present when fentanyl is present. Additionally, it is not uncommon to locate multiple firearms, to include modified pistols and rifles, during these investigations associated with abusers to manufacturers to street-level dealers to traffickers. It is also widely known that drug distributors and local drug dealers continue to thrive on identifying themselves as “one stop” shops, thereby being poly-drug distributors. It simply means that the drug deals carry a variety of desired drugs, which typically includes cocaine, methamphetamine, pharmaceutical drugs, and others. It is of great importance to repeat that local drug dealers and/or regional drug traffickers are dangerous because of the suspects’ possible affiliation with drug cartels and gangs. Violence is prevalent when drug abusers are robbed while trying to purchase,

or score, their drug of choice from drug dealers. Abusers are more closely associated with property crime, where abusers steal to gather items of value or to be converted to cash to purchase these drugs. As a result of the drug's effect on psychological and physiological responses, abusers are more likely to create situations where violence is more likely to occur. Among the Mississippi respondents of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment's Law Enforcement Survey, fentanyl and other opioids were deemed the second most prevalent drug associated with violent crime and property crime.

PRODUCTION



Seized in Lauderdale County,
MS in 2022.

Fentanyl is typically produced in synthesis laboratories located in overseas countries with large pharmaceutical and chemical industries, such as China and India. For awareness purposes, “the most common synthesis route for fentanyl uses two key precursor chemicals: 4-anilino-N-phenethyl-4-piperidine (ANPP) and N-phenethyl-4-piperidone (NPP). ANPP is a Schedule II controlled substance, and NPP is a List I precursor chemical. As common precursor chemicals come under tighter international scrutiny, illicit actors are exploring alternative methods of making fentanyl and buying chemicals to make their own precursors. These chemicals include propionic anhydride, piperidone, propionyl chloride, and aniline”, as described in 21st Century Drug Trafficking: “Manufacturing Advisory” on Fentanyl and Other Synthetic Opioids (Tab A). According to the DEA, the synthetic opioid U-47700 is also used in the production of fentanyl and related-drugs.

According to trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov, synthetic opioids have been sent directly to the United States or shipped to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) in Mexico and Canada for later distribution. This is consistent with the Sinaloa and the New Generation Jalisco cartels being the primary trafficking groups responsible for smuggling fentanyl into the United States from Mexico. According to the DEA, Mexican TCOs are now involved in the synthesis of fentanyl. Based on the amount of powder fentanyl being seized in the United States and Mississippi, it is suspected that fentanyl is being pressed into pills domestically and locally.

To counter domestic production of fentanyl pills, Mississippi enacted the “Victoria Huggins’ Mississippi Pill Press Law of 2022” to address substances being pressed into multicolored and a variety of shapes, as well as, substances being pressed into specific shapes, bearing specific markings and in particular colors, to resembled lawfully manufactured pharmaceutical medications. This law, enacted and effective on July 1, 2022, makes possession of a pill press that isn’t legally authorized by the State Board of Pharmacy or other lawful authority a felony crime punishable by imprisonment up to five years or fined no more than Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00), or both. The law also includes punches, dies, plates, and tableting machines and other equipment for the purpose of manufacturing a controlled substance or counterfeit controlled substance. The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics is working with the Mississippi Board of Pharmacy and other entities, such as the DEA, to ensure the provisions of this law are met and those who violate it will be investigated and prosecuted as defined by state law. This law is

anticipated to have a positive impact on locally manufactured illicit pills, capsules, and other dosage units.

TRANSPORTATION

Fentanyl distributors continue to be of Hispanic origins, but also includes American gangs and other independent traffickers. The Mexico via the Southwest Border (SWB) continues to be the most significant source country for fentanyl and its other forms, such as pressed pills and bulk powder. The most common method of transporting fentanyl, like methamphetamine, continues to be within concealed compartments in personally owned vehicles and small commercial passenger vehicles, typically passenger rental vehicles. As technology continues to expand, the concealment methods are always improving and/or changing, particularly becoming more complex. Some of the more common concealment locations in vehicles include the trunk, seats, gas tanks, quarter panels, dashboards, air cleaners, headlights, and wheels/tires. TCOs also utilize other conveyances, to include highway-authorized commercial vehicles, as well as, railway rail cars, to move product across the country. Another source location, China and other countries overseas, utilize delivery services, such as FedEx, and United Parcel Service (UPS), to send fentanyl around the world and into the United States. Because the profit margin is so large, TCOs and DTOs will use all conveyances to ensure that the drugs reach the intended destinations.

DISTRIBUTION

In response to more people being willing to try fentanyl and not opposed to using powder substances, Mississippi Law Enforcement Officers, especially near the Mississippi Gulf Coast, are encountering more powder fentanyl than pressed pills containing this drug. Local drug trafficking organizations and independent dealers across Mississippi are distributing. As the maps on Page 18 indicate, fentanyl is located throughout Mississippi. Fentanyl, a deadly substance, is dangerous to those who distribute, use, and otherwise encounter.



Seized in Jackson County, MS in 2022.

METHAMPHETAMINE

ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT

Methamphetamine is a potent and highly addictive stimulant that affects the central nervous system by increasing alertness and/or performance. Meth has a storied history from first synthesis in the late 1800s to production in “super labs” controlled by Mexican drug cartels. Today, methamphetamine continues to be controlled by violent Mexican drug cartels, or Narco-Terrorists, who inundate the United States with significant quantities from the seaboard to the seaboard. To shed some light on the overwhelming supply, Mississippi law enforcement officers



Seized in Clarke County, MS in 2022.

in 2010 purchased ounce quantities of “ice” methamphetamine for \$2,200.00 each. In comparison, Mississippi law enforcement officers in 2022 purchased ounce quantities of “ice” methamphetamine for \$375.00 apiece. In 2022, some areas of Mississippi, pound quantities of methamphetamine have been purchased for \$2,000.00 - \$2,200.00 per pound. Methamphetamine is usually found as a powder (lower purity), crystalline shards (higher purity), in a liquid form (further refinement needed or for injection), or in a tablet or capsule dosage unit form. Whether found in powder, crystalline, liquid, or pill form, methamphetamine is most often derived from ephedrine/pseudoephedrine through a series of chemical processes. The combination of “household” products creates a chemical reaction when mixed and thereby altering the molecular structure of this necessary ingredient. Crystal methamphetamine, routinely referred to as “ice”, is the most prevalent form available in the United States, including Mississippi. “Ice” methamphetamine is a clear, crystalline substance that resembles fragments of glass or as a shiny, bluish-white rock. The powder is usually white, off-white, or beige in color, and a product of small, clandestine laboratories. Pill form can resemble lawfully manufactured medications or pressed into a variety of shapes using multiple colors. Regardless of if found in powder, crystalline, liquid, or pill form, methamphetamine is derived from ephedrine/pseudoephedrine through a series of chemical processes, whereas a combination of “household” products is mixed and create a chemical reaction altering the molecular structure of the necessary ingredient.

When discussing methamphetamine and related chemical structures, it is essential to recognize the authorized medical use of methamphetamine and its chemically comparable substance, amphetamine. According to the National Institute of Health, methamphetamine is approved in the United States for the treatment of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children and short-term treatment of obesity. Similarly, amphetamine has also been medically authorized to treat narcolepsy, and other similar medical issues, or disorders, in addition to attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder as outlined by the appropriate authorities of the Federal government. When produced by recognized pharmaceutical manufacturers, methamphetamine is classified under

Federal and state law as a Schedule II Controlled Substance, due to having recognized medical value and high propensity for abuse. Due to this classification, illicit methamphetamine is also a Schedule II Controlled Substance. Legal or illicit methamphetamine have similar effects because they are molecularly the same and target the same receptors in the brain. However, when legal methamphetamine is consumed in a manner not consistent as approved, or as illicit methamphetamine is typically used, larger amounts of the drug enter the brain when smoked, snorted, swallowed, or injected and increases its effect on the user. Elevated levels of the drug in the brain directly impacts the decision of the user to misuse the substance again. Due to its addictive properties and a significant demand for the drug, Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs), or Transnational Organized Criminal (TOC) Syndicates, continue to increase the quantities being smuggled into the United States and distributed throughout the country, to include Mississippi. Because methamphetamine is readily available and cheap, it is one of the drugs most often encountered by law enforcement.

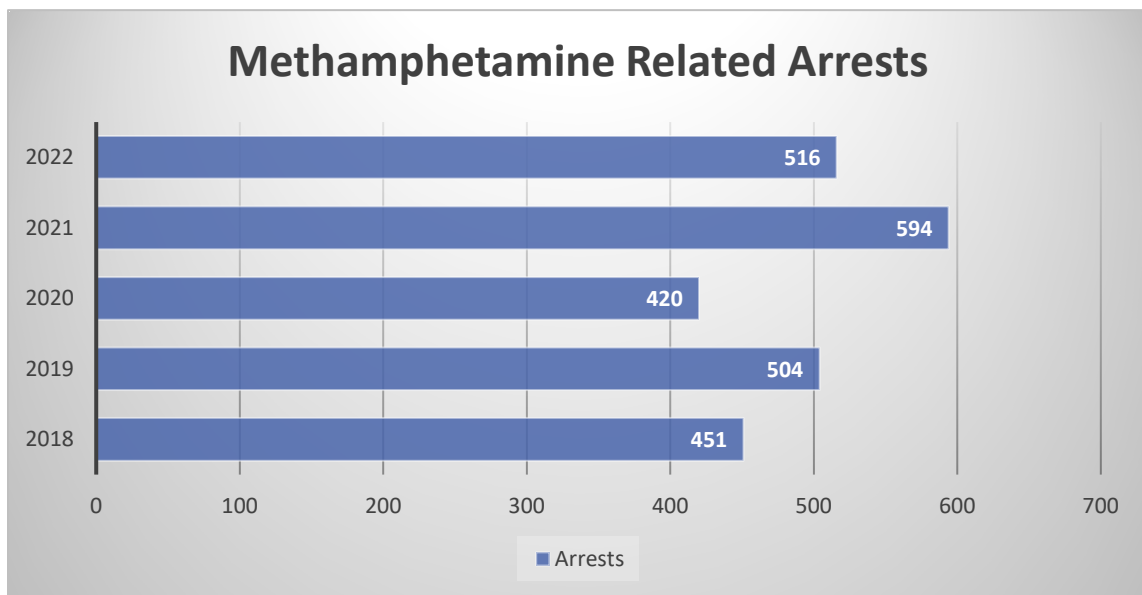
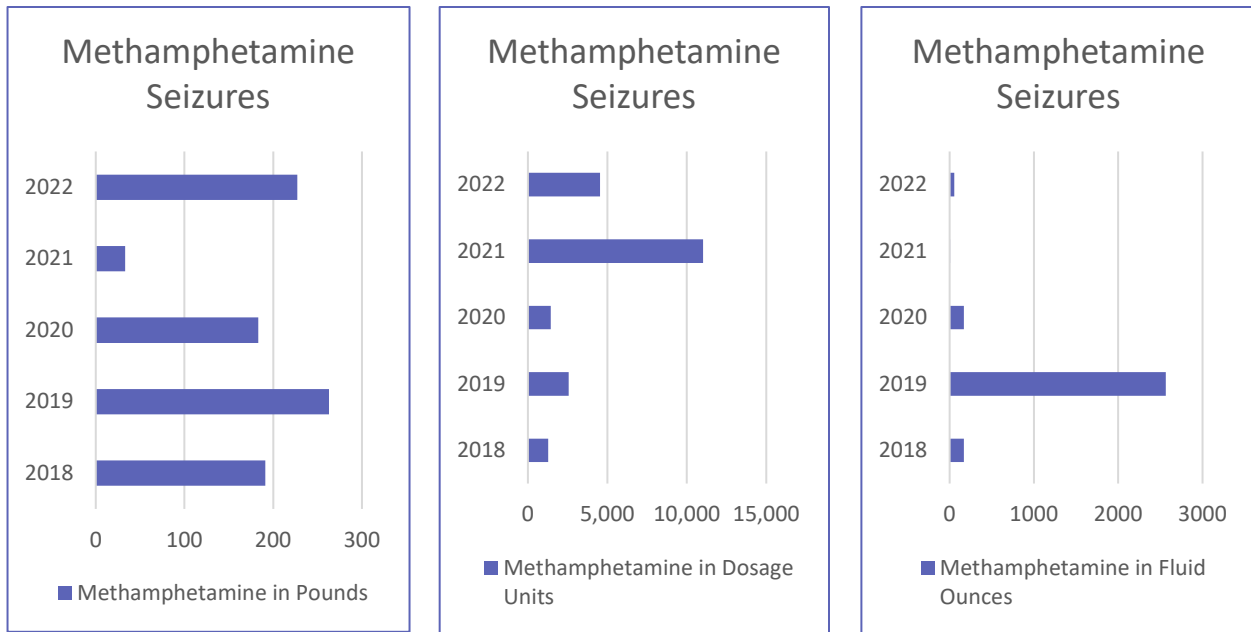


Seized in Forrest County, MS in 2022.

ABUSE

Most of the methamphetamine in Mississippi is found in its purest form, crystal methamphetamine. This form is generally twice as potent as the powder form, typically a product of small, clandestine laboratories, and is identified as at least 85 percent pure or greater. It is not uncommon for the end-user product to be 95-100 percent pure methamphetamine. Due to the purity level, availability, and low cost, long-term abuse is commonplace among users, which includes Caucasian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and other populations across Mississippi and the nation.

Treatment professionals know that purity levels of these substances directly correlate with the euphoria, or “high”, the user experiences. The higher the purity, the higher the level of euphoria that is experienced. Drug users become creatures who seek to recreate the first high experienced with the drug of choice. This is significant in terms of abuse. Due to these factors, long-term abuse leads to law enforcement encounters for drug crimes, property crimes, and violent crimes. Additionally, long-term abuse may lead to substance abuse treatment encounters due to law enforcement encounters, interventions, or other consequences experienced due to drug abuse. Let’s explore these two areas. There were 516 arrests made by MBN for methamphetamine related charges including sale, possession, and manufacture during 2022. Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics initiated a total of 866 methamphetamine cases in 2022. This is a slight decrease from 2021, which had a total of 881 methamphetamine cases investigated. Methamphetamine cases initiated during 2022 by MBN involved the seizure of over 227 combined pounds of solid methamphetamine, over 54 fluid ounces of methamphetamine in solution, and approximately 4,541 individual dosage units of methamphetamine. In comparison, MBN investigations in 2021 involved the seizure of over 33 combined pounds of solid methamphetamine, over 5.5 fluid ounces of methamphetamine in solution, and approximately 11,027 individual dosage units of methamphetamine.



MBN 2018-2022 Stats for Seizures and Methamphetamine-Related Arrests

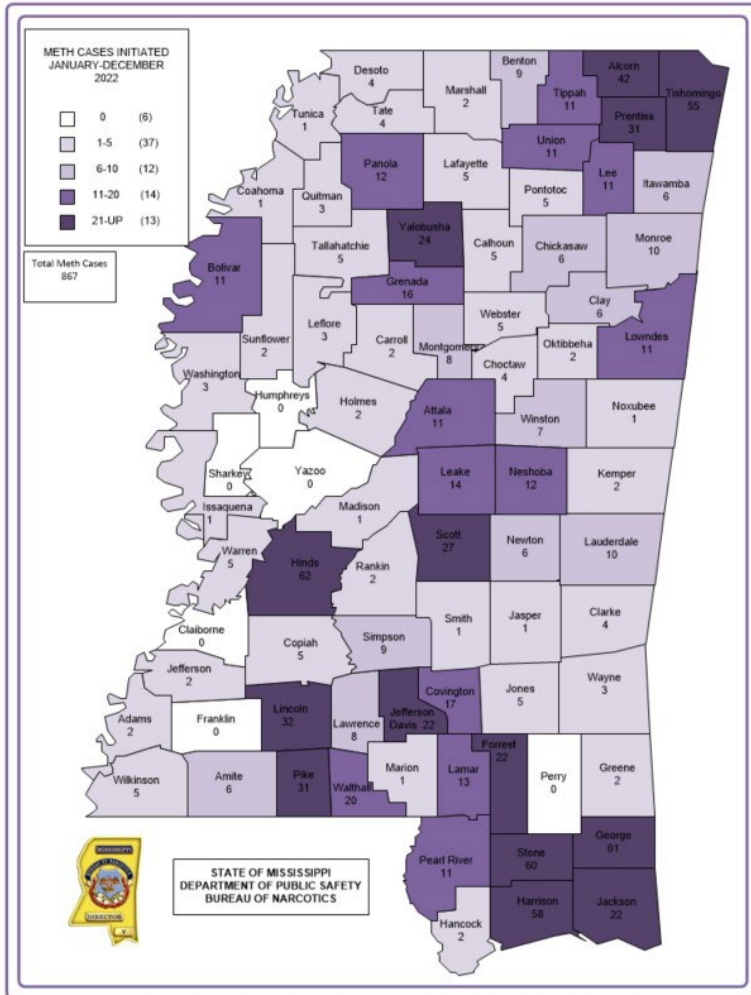
Due to the widespread abuse of methamphetamine, the likelihood of seeking treatment for this drug is highly probable due to the consequences of said illicit use. The Mississippi Department of Mental Health reported 390 people were admitted for methamphetamine abuse as a primary substance in 2022. This is a decrease from 2021 in which 1,322 individuals were admitted for abuse of methamphetamine as a primary substance. Of the 390 people admitted in 2022, 68%, or 265 individuals, were ages 26 to 45. 58 individuals were between the ages of 19-25, while 64 individuals were between 46-65 years old. Exploring the data treatment for secondary substance abuse, 149 individuals reported methamphetamine use behind an undisclosed primary substance. Of these individuals, 68% were ages 26 to 45. Like the primary substance data, 16 individuals

were between the ages 19-25, while 30 individuals were 46-65 years old. The tertiary substance, or third in order, followed the same pattern with the majority being between the ages of 26-45. It should be noted that only 235 individuals were admitted for abuse of methamphetamine as their primary substance in 2020, but 1,604 individuals were admitted for treatment for meth as the primary substance in 2019. However, the admittance to treatment varies greatly from year to year, possibly due to it being a very specific decision made by the drug abuser to want *and* seek help.

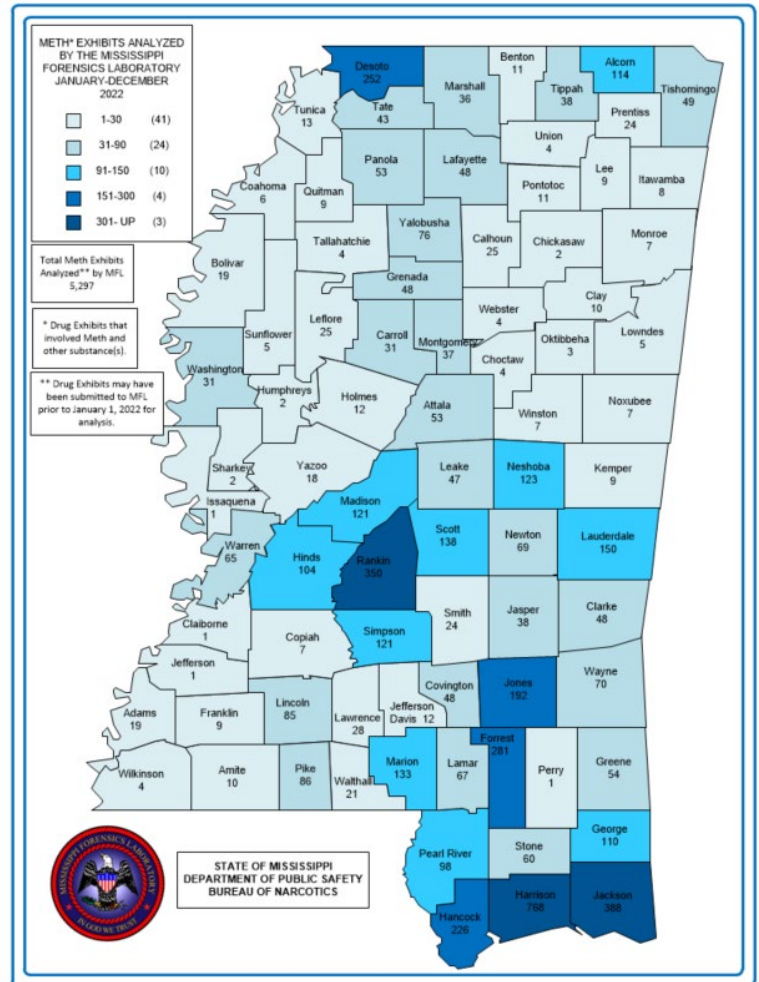
AVAILABILITY

Due to a myriad of reasons, methamphetamine is readily available in essentially every community in the Union, including Mississippi. The Mexican drug cartels, primarily the Sinaloa Drug Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), dominate the wholesale distribution of methamphetamine, and other drugs, in the United States. National, regional, and/or local drug trafficking organizations are intricately involved in the distribution of methamphetamine. As previously mentioned, crystal methamphetamine is the primary choice for meth users due to an abundant supply, cheap price, and its purity resulting in consistent and desirable “highs”. In addition to crystal methamphetamine, pressed pills, or dosage units, containing methamphetamine also remain available. However, it is suspected that these pills are believed to be methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), a synthetic designer drug, or a legitimately manufactured pharmaceutical dosage units, such as amphetamine salts, to the distributor, dealer, and/or end-user. For a snapshot of the availability of methamphetamine, let’s look at the seizures made at the border by the United States Custom and Border Protection (CBP). According to CBP Office of Field Operations, CBP seized over 175,000 pounds of cocaine during fiscal year (FY) 2022 (October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021). In comparison, CBP seized nearly 192,000 pounds of methamphetamine in FY 2021 and almost 178,000 pounds in FY 2020.

For almost 11 years, Mississippi experienced a drastic decrease in local clandestine laboratories producing methamphetamine due to the passing of House Bill 512 in 2010, which was introduced by the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics and supported by other law enforcement agencies. The law went into effect on July 1, 2010, whereas the primary ingredient, ephedrine/pseudoephedrine, became a Schedule III Controlled Substance in Mississippi. This removed the medication, such as Actifed and Sudafed, from being available over the counter (OTC) to requiring a medical provider’s prescription. Based on the review of statistics, MBN was only involved in 239 investigations involving the manufacture of methamphetamine, which included a combination of “active labs”, “dump sites”, and “precursor chemical glassware seizures” between June 1, 2010 through December 31, 2021. In 2021, the Mississippi Legislature passed Senate Bill 2119 allowing products containing certain amounts of ephedrine/pseudoephedrine to be sold without a prescription. Senate Bill 2119 called for the repeal of House Bill 512 (2010) and the law went into effect on January 1, 2022. Based on a review of statistics, MBN has only been involved in two investigations involving the manufacture of methamphetamine during calendar year 2022 and being a combination of “active labs”, “dump sites”, or “precursor chemical glassware seizures”. Clandestine laboratory investigations pose a real danger to public safety and public health in Mississippi, including first responders and the public.



MBN Meth Cases Initiated in 2022

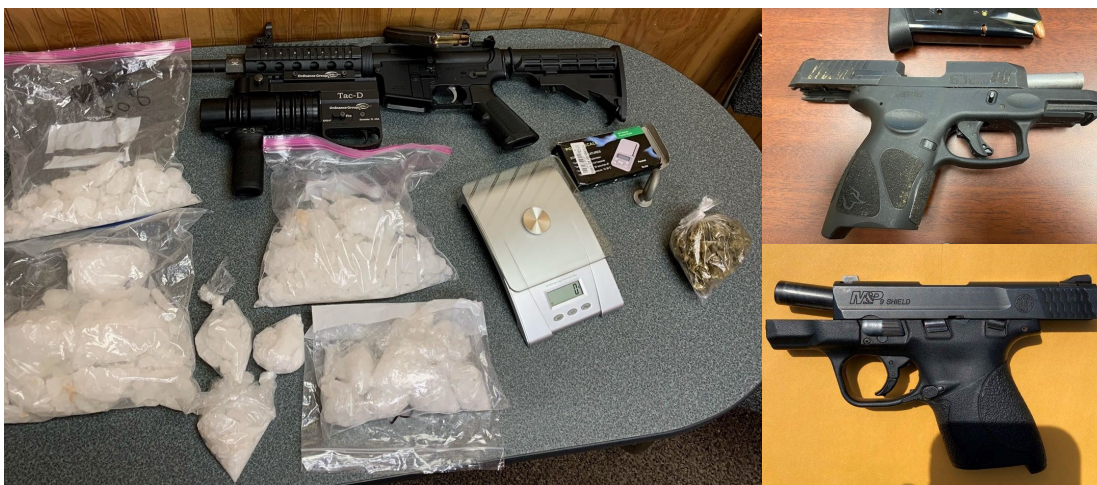


MFL Meth Exhibits Analyzed During 2022

Although volatile dangers are not typically present in cases involving “ice” methamphetamine or pressed pills, dangers are still ever present for first responders and the public. The number of methamphetamine related cases remains significant in Mississippi. It indicates the sheer quantity of the drug present in every county of the state, whereas the maps depict methamphetamine being present in all 82 counties. When drugs are present, the danger is also nearby.

ASSOCIATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Law enforcement officers having authority in local, state, and/or Federal jurisdictions face unparalleled dangers to earlier times due to increased acts of violence, potency of substances encountered, and more advanced technology being utilized to protect the interests of criminals. Law enforcement officers are not alone in being victims of associated crime and violence. Looking from 30,000 feet, transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and domestic drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) share a propensity for violence to protect their illicit methamphetamine and the related proceeds. Drug distribution is a massive business with large profits for those involved which provides monetary resources to invest in protecting their product and livelihood. These individuals use threats and acts of violence to further their criminal activity, as well as ensure that they are not victims of violent crime. Similarly, investigating local drug dealers and regional drug traffickers is dangerous because of the suspects' possible affiliation with drug cartels and gangs. Through communication, exposure, and other means, local drug dealers learn methods from large-scale crime syndicates to implement safety measures to practice during routine drug transactions, transportation, storage, or other aspects of drug distribution. These practices include conducting surveillance, counter-surveillance, and installing tracking devices to monitor activity related to these criminal enterprises. Additionally, it is common to locate multiple firearms, to include modified pistols and rifles, during these investigations associated with abusers to manufacturers to street-level dealers to mid-level to top-tier traffickers.



Left: Firearm and Drugs seized in Jones County, MS in 2022; Top right: Firearm seized in Smith County, MS in 2022; Bottom right: Firearm seized in Quitman County, MS in 2022.

Methamphetamine abuse is a main culprit behind property crime due to individuals seeking property to pawn or trade for their next high. Drug abusers, including methamphetamine addicts, also commit crimes such as shoplifting and burglary, for the purpose outlined above. Lower-level criminal activity, to include shoplifting, has been committed to obtain quantities of precursor chemicals as their contribution to the local “cook” for a portion of the manufactured product. Meth abusers, also referred to as “tweakers”, are always fidgeting and collecting items, usually in the form of theft. Drilling down to the individual abuser and attributing petty crimes with this population can best be summarized as “busy hands are happy hands”. Additionally, methamphetamine use, albeit abusers, manufacturers, or drug distributors, is commonly

associated with a level of agitation and paranoia. Through these characteristics, individuals can become violent toward themselves or others, rather quickly. As a result of the drug's effect on psychological and physiological responses, abusers are more likely to create situations where violence is more likely to occur. Among the Mississippi respondents of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment's Law Enforcement Survey, methamphetamine was deemed the most prevalent drug associated with violent crime and property crime.

Locally produced, or "homemade", methamphetamine, in clandestine laboratories, violence is associated mainly with booby-traps and firearms directed at law enforcement officers performing their lawful duties. Due to these concerns and support by law enforcement agencies across the state, Mississippi enacted into law on July 1, 2005, a sentencing enhancement added to defendants who possess firearms and/or booby-traps on premises or property during an investigation or at the time of arrest. Additionally, methamphetamine labs contain combustible materials that often result in explosions and fires, which pose significant threats to the environment and law enforcement, and the general population. Another aspect of crimes and violence related to methamphetamine undoubtedly includes children. Whether a methamphetamine laboratory is discovered because of a search warrant, undercover purchase, traffic stop, or complaint from a citizen, children have been present. These children are exposed to dangerous chemicals during the manufacturing process. It should be noted that the children who are discovered in these environments are normally related to the laboratory owners and manufacturers, or other participants.

PRODUCTION

During the better part of at least two decades, Mississippi has been negatively impacted by methamphetamine. Mississippi law enforcement officers, particularly those trained in clandestine laboratory investigations, have participated in methamphetamine manufacturing investigations since the late 1990s. Through the years, law enforcement officers have identified and successfully conducted investigations on local methamphetamine "cooks", along with their co-conspirators and associates. These investigations typically involved individuals in local communities manufacturing methamphetamine through a variety of known chemical processes. These labs usually resulted in lower quality product that would be a powder form. At the same time, Mississippians learned of methamphetamine being produced on the West Coast, primarily in California and in Mexico by Mexican drug cartels, such as the Arellano-Felix Cartel. Mississippi Drug Investigators sought to identify the source of supply, whereas their investigations were linked to "super labs" controlled by Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs). The methamphetamine from the "super labs" were also distributed in a powder form. Over the years, Mississippi Drug Investigators, along with local, state, and Federal partners, have linked methamphetamine to other Mexican Drug Cartels, such as the Gulf Cartel and Sinaloa Cartel. Mexican TCOs continue to significantly impact Mississippi through the distribution of crystal methamphetamine, or "ice", throughout the state by loose affiliations, at the very least, with national, regional, and local drug trafficking organizations. Because methamphetamine is cheap to produce, Mexican TCOs have continued to increase the quantity and quality of the methamphetamine distributed in the United States and worldwide. Again, lower-level, or street-level, dealers routinely distribute 95 percent pure or higher "ice" methamphetamine to the end-users in every Mississippi community.

To curb production of methamphetamine, United States Congress passed the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005, which requires that pharmacies and other retail stores keep logs of purchases of products containing ephedrine/pseudoephedrine and limits the amount of those products an individual can purchase per day. These restrictions had an impact on the domestic production of methamphetamine. However, local criminals exploited gaps in the Federal law and continued to manufacture methamphetamine. Due to criminals exploiting the restrictions in place and the manufacture of methamphetamine being contrary to public health and public safety, Mississippi enacting legislation scheduling ephedrine/pseudoephedrine in 2010. This piece of legislation had a significant impact on domestic production of methamphetamine in Mississippi. Whether Mississippi has one or one thousand clandestine laboratories, these laboratories create public health, public safety, and environmental hazards that demand a law enforcement response. Due to the ease of the “One Pot” method, also referred to as the “Shake and Bake” method, was once the most common method used in manufacturing methamphetamine in Mississippi. This method is a variation of the Birch Reduction Method, referred to as the “Nazi” method due to origins in Germany, that takes less time to complete the chemical reaction. Due to methamphetamine “cooks”, or “chemists,” being sentenced to lengthy prison terms, the low quality of the product, and continued influx of Mexican-produced crystal methamphetamine into Mississippi, local cooks are scarce. Moreover, local methamphetamine production has declined dramatically over the past decade or so due to the increased popularity of Mexican produced methamphetamine. Because the “cooking” process is a chemical reaction, common manufacturing sites for local labs include the trunks of cars, truck beds, apartments or motel rooms, and remote outdoor locations. Methamphetamine manufacturing poses environmental and health concerns, to include fire or explosion and public exposure to chemicals and hazardous waste from these laboratories in rural and suburban areas.

For years, law enforcement across the country, including Mississippi, focused on the chemical molecular manufacture of methamphetamine from a public health and public safety vantage point. This was reported by law enforcement and the media as “meth labs”. Typically, law enforcement officers associated non-pharmaceutical shaped pills to be methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) and not methamphetamine. With the lack of focus on pill presses and similar devices, criminal organizations have exploited this gap and press methamphetamine into these non-pharmaceutical shaped pills and pills that resemble known pharmaceutical medications, such as amphetamine salts, namely Adderall. In 2022, law enforcement agencies across Mississippi seized pills containing methamphetamine, as depicted in the photograph to the right.



Seized in Quitman County, MS in 2022.

To address substances being pressed into multicolored dosage units and a variety of shapes, as well as substances being pressed into specific shapes, bearing specific markings and in particular colors, to resembled lawfully manufactured pharmaceutical medications, Mississippi enacted the “Victoria Huggins’ Mississippi Pill Press Law of 2022”. This law, enacted and effective on July 1, 2022, makes possession of a pill press that isn’t legally authorized by the State Board of Pharmacy or other lawful authority a felony crime punishable by imprisonment up to five years or fined no more than Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00), or both. The law also includes punches,

dies, plates, and tableting machines and other equipment for the purpose of manufacturing a controlled substance or counterfeit controlled substance. The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics is working with the Mississippi Board of Pharmacy and other entities to ensure the provisions of this law are met and those who violate it will be investigated. This law is anticipated to positively impact locally manufactured illicit pills, capsules, and other dosage units resulting in smaller quantities being produced and distributed.

TRANSPORTATION



Seized in Washington County, MS in 2022.

Methamphetamine distributors were originally American motorcycle gangs and other independent traffickers. It is believed that these groups are still involved in the production, transportation, and distribution of methamphetamine. The West Coast area and Mexico continue to be source areas for crystal methamphetamine and its other forms, such as pressed pills and liquid composition. The most common method of transporting methamphetamine continues to be within concealed compartments in personally owned vehicles and small commercial passenger vehicles, typically passenger rental vehicles. As technology continues to expand, the

concealment methods are always improving and/or changing, particularly becoming more complex. Some of the more common concealment locations in vehicles include the trunk, seats, gas tanks, quarter panels, dashboards, air cleaners, headlights, and wheels/tires. TCOs also utilize other conveyances, to include highway-authorized commercial vehicles, as well as, railway rail cars, to move product across the country. The United States Postal Service and next-day delivery services, such as FedEx, are also commonly utilized to transport methamphetamine. Because the profit margin is so large, TCOs and DTOs will use any and all conveyances to ensure that the drugs reach their intended destinations.

DISTRIBUTION

Methamphetamine continues to be distributed by local drug trafficking organizations and independent dealers across Mississippi. Methamphetamine distribution now occurs everywhere, and it not limited to just truck stops, clubs, low-to-medium income apartments, mobile home parks, hotels, restaurant parking lots, and other rural areas, which have been common and expected settings. In response to more people being willing to try drugs, to include methamphetamine, most distributors and dealers make efforts to change their delivery practices and accommodate people from all backgrounds and socioeconomic status. Mid-level and street-level dealers understand that they must look for creative ways to expand their clientele to maintain their lifestyles. Distributors must also identify ways to connect with the ever-changing clientele, whereas methamphetamine continues to be



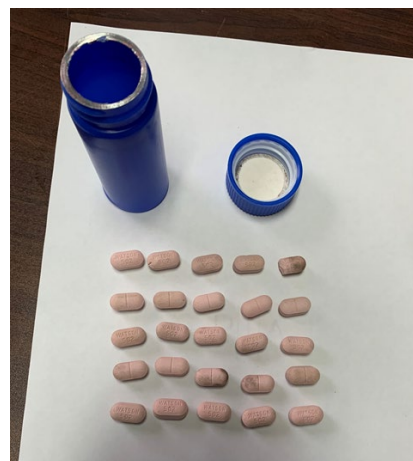
Seized in Lincoln County, MS in 2022.

predominately as “ice” methamphetamine, but pressed pills, liquid, and powder form remain available due to end-user preferences.

PHARMACEUTICAL DRUG DIVERSION

ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT

Pharmaceutical Drug Diversion, also referred to as Pharmaceutical Diversion, is when prescription medications are used by someone other than for whom they were intended or used in a manner other than prescribed. The use and abuse of diverted pharmaceuticals is a serious problem that affects the health, social and economic welfare of all communities, not only in Mississippi but all over the country. Typically, individuals seek to obtain more restricted medications, which are deemed as controlled substances as designated by DEA or state legislatures. These medications are scheduled, Schedule II through Schedule V Controlled Substances, due to the potential for abuse and accepted medical value which Schedule Controlled Substances have a higher risk for abuse. However, some prescription regulated, non-controlled medications are also sought by abusers and drug dealers due to the molecular structure of the medications in which they act like controlled substances. These medications are routinely the most prescribed and in high demand in both, the legitimate and illicit markets, such as those that help with pain, anxiety, sleep, hyperactivity, and weight loss. The biggest threat lies in pharmaceuticals that are obtained by forgery and theft, whereas organized groups of individuals focus their efforts on specific drugs of choice to be further distributed. Again, most of the diversion cases that are being investigated are related to prescription forgeries. MBN, along with its law enforcement and regulatory partners, routinely investigate and affect arrests for prescription forgery and fraud, pharmaceutical theft, illegal possession of pharmaceutical medications, and the illicit distribution of these medications in Mississippi. Healthcare professionals, either as a criminal act or merely being less scrupulous, also impact the availability of these drugs to addicts and criminals. Law enforcement encounters all segments of society involved in pharmaceutical diversion activity: young people, older adults, and everyone in between. Furthermore, law enforcement continues to encounter the less fortunate to the wealthy, including lawyers, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, doctors, veterinarians, nurses, business professionals, homemakers, and others involved in some aspect of pharmaceutical diversion and distribution of prescription medications. Unlawful acquisition, theft, and distribution of pharmaceutical medications continue to be a primary drug threat in Mississippi.



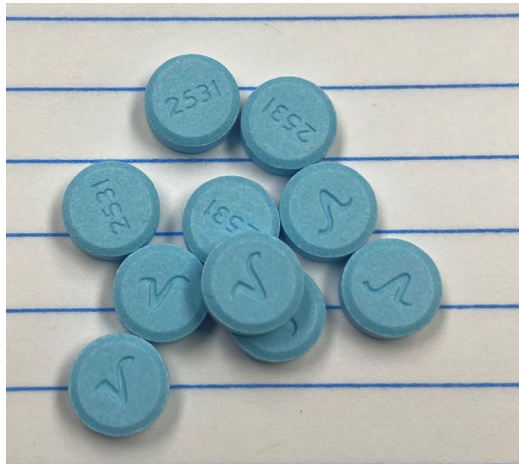
Hydrocodone/Acetaminophen, a Narcotic,
Seized in Scott County, MS during 2022

ABUSE

Prescription medication abuse can be best illustrated by the number of cases initiated involving diverted medications, the type and number analyzed by the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory, or

even based on the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program's (MS PMP) provisional data. According to the MS PMP, data analysis identifies the "Top Ten" list of medications prescribed in the state during specified periods. An initial review of these sources indicates that the following classes, or categories, of drugs are the most prevalent, which includes narcotics, stimulants, and depressants. To unpack the categories before moving forward, there are essentially five classes of drugs which are narcotics, stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, and cannabis. To regress, let's look at the three that are very applicable to diverted pharmaceuticals.

Drug users, abusers, and dealers seek the commonly prescribed pharmaceuticals due to familiarity with them such as the following medications: hydrocodone (trade, or brand, names include: Vicodin, Norco, Lortab, Lorcet, Hycodan, Vicoprofen, and others); oxycodone (trade, or brand, names include: Oxycontin, Roxicet, Roxicodone, Tylox, Percocet, and others); hydromorphone (trade, or brand, names include: Dilaudid, Exalgo, and others);



Clonazepam, a Depressant, Seized in Clay County, MS during 2022

pharmaceutical diversion. Once considered "kiddy dope", pharmaceuticals encapsulated to include narcotics, depressants, and stimulants lead to the slippery slope of drug abuse that can lead to using harder drugs and death. For law enforcement, pharmaceutical diversion, specifically prescription forgery and pharmacy burglary cases seem to hit in droves and then become almost non-existent until the next spurt. However, diversion by healthcare professionals, to include writing illegal prescriptions, stealing from patients, or theft from stock bottles and dispensing machines, occurs in a steady flow, as opposed to ebbs and flows. Let's look at some numbers.

During 2022, MBN initiated 260 investigations involving prescription drugs. Of these, 221 cases involving prescription narcotics (ex. hydrocodone), 7 cases involving prescription depressants



Alprazolam, a Depressant, Seized in Benton County, MS during 2022

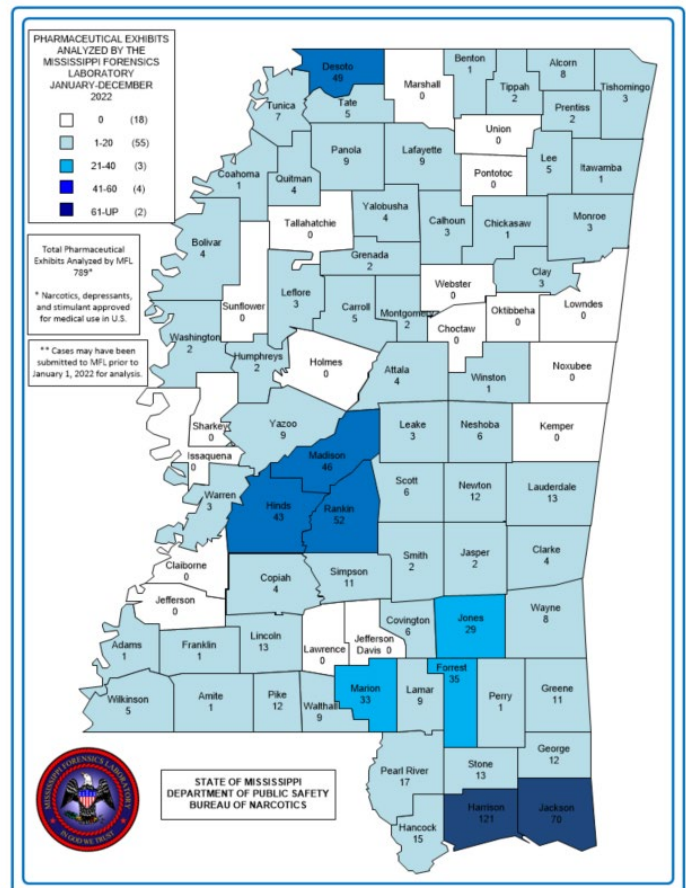
tramadol (trade, or brand, names include: Ultram, Ultracet); methylphenidate (trade, or brand names include: Ritalin, Metadate CD, Concerta, and others); dextroamphetamine (trade, or brand, names include: Dexedrine, Adderall (combo with amphetamines), and others); amphetamine (trade, or brand, names include: Evekeo, Dynavel, and others); alprazolam (trade, or brand, names include: Xanax, Niravam, and others); clonazepam (trade, or brand, names include: Klonopin); zolpidem (trade, or brand, names include: Ambien, Zolpimist, and others); diazepam (trade, or brand, names include: Valium, Diastat, and others); and others. From that short, but familiar list, it is apparent that law enforcement in Mississippi must be concerned and actively investigate crimes of



Carisoprodol, a Depressant, Seized in Benton County, MS during 2022

(ex. alprazolam), and 17 involving prescription stimulants (ex. amphetamine). In comparison, MBN initiated 219 cases involving prescription narcotics, 80 cases involving prescription depressants, and 33 cases involving prescription stimulants in 2021, which tallies up to 332 investigations. MBN initiated 203 cases involving pharmaceuticals in 2020, 346 pharmaceutical-related cases in 2019, and 238 similar cases in 2018. Prescription forgeries, thefts, possession, and distribution are the primary means MBN initiates investigations involving diverted pharmaceuticals. These figures are consistent with the ebbs and flows that are typically observed with this activity.

The Mississippi Forensics Laboratory provided valuable data that helps paint the picture of pharmaceutical drug diversion in Mississippi. During calendar year 2022, MFL Drug Section analyzed pharmaceutical-related drug evidence from 64 out of 82 counties. From reviewing available Drug Section data, the below referenced information relates to pharmaceutical medications that are classified as narcotics, depressants, and stimulants. The MFL Drug Section has been backlogged in performing analysis partly due to the number of drug exhibits being submitted for analysis. Since analysis is an on-going process, the number of pharmaceuticals encountered and analyzed may identify trends, patterns, and public health and safety concerns. The maps below depict Mississippi to have a problem with pharmaceutical drugs.



Thus far, we have seen a glimpse of the commonly diverted pharmaceuticals based on a snapshot of law enforcements' efforts to protect the public and the related findings from drug analysis by the state crime laboratory. Let's look deeper into the most abused medications.

The Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MS PMP), which is housed under the Mississippi Board of Pharmacy, maintains a wealth of data as it relates to medications that are prescribed and dispensed. This valuable program provides a litmus test of current drugs that are being prescribed, and more than likely, being abused and diverted into the black market.

According to the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MS PMP), the "Top 10" medications prescribed in Mississippi during Calendar Year 2022 reflected a slight change from Calendar Year 2021. This list continued to be dominated by an assortment of narcotics, stimulants, and benzodiazepines. Hydrocodone continues to be the most prescribed medication during this time followed by dextroamphetamine and oxycodone being ranked as third, a change from last year. Dextroamphetamine and oxycodone swapped places in the "Top 10" in 2022 from 2021 based on the provisional data. During Calendar Year 2020, the top three medications in the "Top 10" included hydrocodone, oxycodone, and dextroamphetamine, respectively. Review the

charts below for more information relating to

Active Ingredient	Prescription Count	Quantity
Hydrocodone	1,116,773	57,788,185
Oxycodone	484,635	30,378,841
Dextroamphetamine	446,923	23,015,630
Tramadol	391,033	22,057,134
Alprazolam	347,467	18,974,357
Zolpidem	315,415	10,426,725
Clonazepam	254,153	13,460,734
Methylphenidate	217,342	8,634,094
Buprenorphine	199,514	7,085,613
Amphetamine	192,578	6,117,278

the "Top 10" lists of prescribed controlled pharmaceuticals with prescription counts and quantities dispensed for calendar years 2018 through 2022.

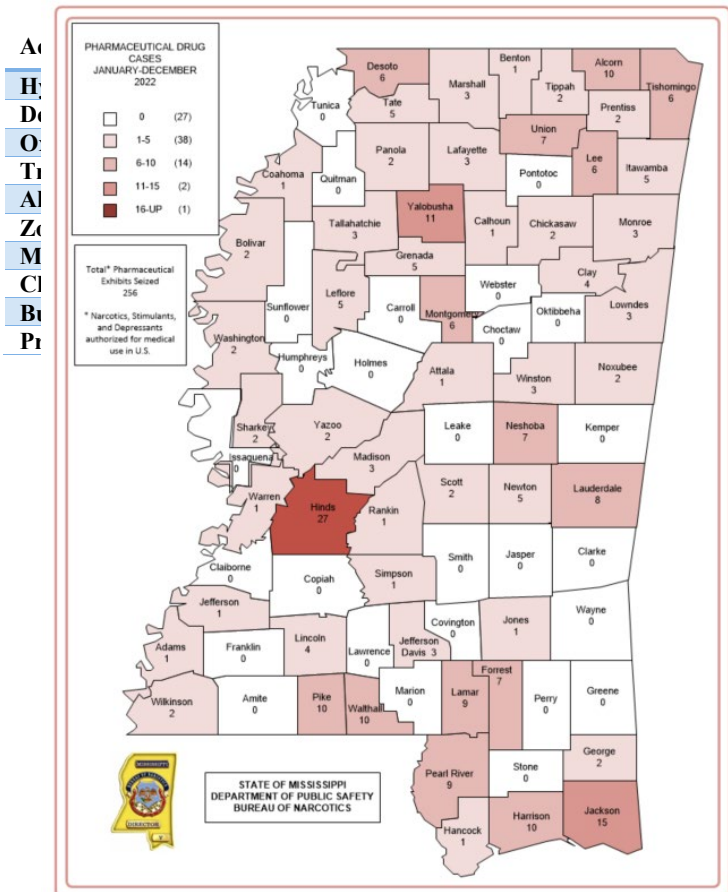
Calendar Year 2022
Calendar Year 2021

MFL Pharmaceutical Exhibits Analyzed During 2022

Calendar Year 2019

MBN Cases Involving Pharmaceuticals During 2022

Calendar Year 2020





Hydrocodone, a Narcotic, Seized in Tippah County, MS during 2022

Year 2018

Calendar

Medical providers in Mississippi are writing a lot of prescriptions for medications that are situated firmly in the most prescribed and abused categories across the nation. Americans have an affinity for pain medications, benzodiazepines, and stimulants. Although the number of prescriptions written for these medications is alarming when viewed in black and white, the quantities have shown a downward turn in almost, if not all categories, over the past several years. However, to put American's belief that medications are needed and necessary to survive, the Minnesota Department of Health released an updated snapshot of our country's use of pain medications in October 2022. This update reflected data that has been previously reported where the United

States

Active Ingredient	Prescription Count	Quantity
Hydrocodone	1,126,739	59,312,395
Oxycodone	463,188	29,417,728
Dextroamphetamine	405,074	21,068,028
Tramadol	402,847	22,977,108
Alprazolam	359,901	19,598,290
Zolpidem	325,144	10,661,947
Clonazepam	260,609	13,756,350
Buprenorphine	211,365	6,740,051
Methylphenidate	205,357	8,388,694
Amphetamine	191,056	6,020,031

Active Ingredient	Prescription Count	Quantity
Hydrocodone	1,210,708	64,618,565
Oxycodone	476,608	29,852,670
Tramadol	425,245	24,426,097
Dextroamphetamine	391,991	20,316,177
Alprazolam	372,967	20,212,064
Zolpidem	335,803	10,809,407
Clonazepam	270,784	14,107,902
Buprenorphine	227,119	6,058,760
Methylphenidate	220,862	8,844,853
Amphetamine	215,281	6,907,396

consumes over 80% of the world's opioids, yet Americans only make up world's population.

Provisional data for "Top 10" pharmaceutical medications by prescription count with dispensed quantities (in dosage units) for 2018-2022. Source: Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MS PMP).

Active Ingredient	Prescription Count	Quantity
Hydrocodone	1,377,593	76,164,335
Oxycodone	507,267	32,467,779
Tramadol	478,218	29,458,742
Alprazolam	445,617	24,920,367
Dextroamphetamine	385,228	19,743,481
Zolpidem	376,991	12,006,513
Clonazepam	315,516	16,769,386
Buprenorphine	235,905	5,532,966
Amphetamine	220,847	7,057,353
Codeine	216,669	22,775,099

4.4% of the

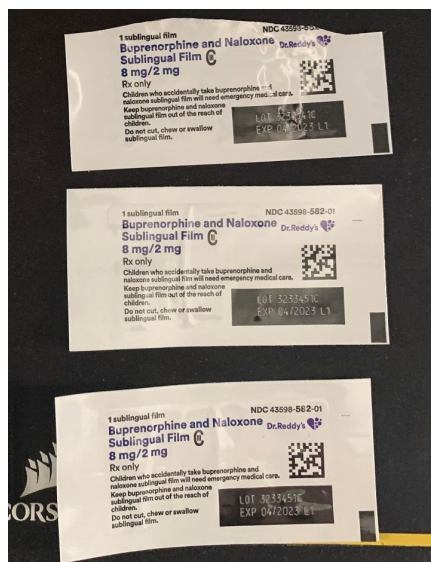
Additionally, the U.S.

consumes

approximately 99% of the world's hydrocodone supply. These are facts and the prescribing information is consistent with this situation the U.S. faces with legal and illicit use of pharmaceutical medications.

MBN has found that some abusers were lawfully prescribed their medication or medications, of choice and had a desire to continue to feel the effects produced by this drug after the prescription was depleted. Other abusers were introduced to a drug by a family member or acquaintance and enjoyed the feeling that it caused. Furthermore, abusers continued to seek to find this medication from sources including licensed medical providers, prescription forgery activity, stealing from family and friend's medicine cabinets, purchasing quantities of friends and acquaintances' legitimate supply, and seeking an illicit source on the street. Like "street drugs", abusers seek to obtain the elusive high that got them hooked in the beginning. As supply and demand impacts the availability of hydrocodone, oxycodone, alprazolam, and other pharmaceuticals, illicitly pressed pills, containing fentanyl and other substances that mimic or appear to be the desired pill, continue to be sold to users seeking particularly marked pharmaceutical medications. Unfortunately, these counterfeit pills can have lethal consequences. To combat this dangerous situation, MBN Agents continue to investigate the increasing numbers of diverted pharmaceuticals and overdose-related cases throughout the state. MBN maintains a valued partnership with DEA's Tactical Diversion Squad based in Jackson, Mississippi.

As MBN continues to investigate allegations of wrongdoing as it pertains to pharmaceutical medications, MBN believes it is necessary to conduct training for increased awareness and expanded partnerships with local, state, and Federal law enforcement agencies. We continue to see the abuse of opioids and other pharmaceutically manufactured controlled substances diverted from their legitimate use and introduced into the black market across our state. This continued pattern forces law enforcement to focus and refine their training, policies, and procedures to proactively combat this dangerous situation of epic proportions. Additionally, the introduction of substances and continued use of known cutting agents is a significant concern for law enforcement, as well as overdose response strategy experts. However, the adulteration of medications with more deadly medications or other substances, such as fentanyl, xylazine, dimethyltryptamine, eutylone, bromazolam, and clonazepam, needs to be pressed into the minds of abusers and family members alike due to the potentially fatal outcome.



Buprenorphine and Naloxone, a Narcotic,
Seized in Lamar County during 2022

So, how do we identify the abuser or the drug dealer of pharmaceutical medications? As previously mentioned, abusers and drug dealers come from all segments of society. The abuser can look like anyone: a grandparent, a business professional, a student, a healthcare professional, and a professional athlete. Diverted pharmaceuticals are primarily obtained by three distinctly different types of criminals. The first criminal is an individual who has become addicted to the

medication or medications and seeks to fraudulently obtain the medication with the primary objective being for personal use and self-medication. The second criminal is more likely to be an individual who seeks medication and sells part of the prescription to provide financial means to continue the addiction driven behavior. The third criminal is an individual, or a group of individuals, who illegally obtain specific medications that are in high demand in the black market for the sole purpose to further distribute and profit from the criminal activity. The only difference between an abuser and a drug dealer based on a legal definition is one maintains exclusive possession and use of the drug and the other gives or sells all or any portion of these pharmaceutical medications to an individual who doesn't have a legal reason to possess them. MBN and other law enforcement partners investigate complaints of diversion, charges are brought against those involved, arrests are made for the diversion and distribution of pharmaceuticals in Mississippi, and convictions are inevitable. Surprising to some, criminal fraud, theft, possession, and distribution charges and convictions are levied against individuals including lawyers, pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, doctors, nurses, business professionals, homemakers, and others, who are not typically considered to be drug dealers. Let's examine the availability of pharmaceuticals as it relates to legitimate supply chains, as well as questionable acquisition practices and the black market.

AVAILABILITY

The availability of legitimate pharmaceutical medication is directly and indirectly correlated with the established supply chain, as well as mandates imposed by the United States Federal Government, particularly the Food and Drug Administration and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The manufacturers of controlled pharmaceuticals are held to many restrictions that impact the availability of these medications. For example, mandated manufacturer restrictions on quantities produced to the quantities that are allowed to be ordered by wholesale distributors and down to the percentage allowed to be allocated to retail and non-retail pharmacies impact every community. The continued shortage of prescription medications and high demand are forcing some addicts to turn to the street to obtain prescription medications, which have a higher probability of being laced with fentanyl or other substances and can be deadly. As routinely mentioned, the illicit use of legally available pharmaceutical medications obtained from pharmacies, such as those that help with pain, anxiety, sleep, hyperactivity, and weight loss, remains prevalent. To meet the illicit supply and demand, "lone wolf" individuals and organized groups of individuals seek to obtain these medications illegally for personal use and distribution. Some methods for obtaining pharmaceutical medications include: 1) legitimately obtaining prescriptions then diverting a portion for abuse or financial gain; 2) being given by, bought from, or taken from a friend or relative; 3) stealing medical providers' prescription pads; 4) producing counterfeit prescriptions; 5) purchasing from internet pharmacies; and 6) calling pharmacists impersonating medical providers for unlawful "orders". Some abusers and organized groups intentionally seek prescriptions from multiple medical providers, which is often referred to as "doctor shopping" or "doctor hopping", to obtain larger quantities of medications. This is routinely done by complaining of the same ailment in an effort to obtain duplicate prescriptions for personal use. Other abusers steal prescription blanks or fraudulently call-in prescriptions to secure quantities of desired medications to support their habit. Additionally, some physicians, and other medical providers, willingly help individuals abuse prescription drugs by writing prescriptions when there is no medical need, usually associated with some personal gain. MBN

continues to see intrastate and interstate organized groups who utilize high quality fraudulently manufactured prescriptions to secure large quantities of pharmaceuticals to illegally distribute inside and outside of Mississippi's borders.

INTERNET PHARMACIES

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), purchasing pharmaceuticals from online pharmacies can have dangerous or deadly consequences. Some of the risks of purchasing from an online pharmacy are:

- Receiving counterfeit, contaminated, expired or unsafe pharmaceuticals
- Putting yourself at risk for adverse side-effects, especially with other medications being taken
- Jeopardizing the security of your personal and financial information
- Opening yourself up to an overwhelming amount of spam phone calls and emails

An easy way to determine if the online pharmacy is high risk is if they:

- Do not require a prescription
- Do not provide contact information such as an address or phone number
- Advertise extremely low prices
- Fail to participate in any insurance plan, instead, requiring payment up front by credit card or cash on delivery (COD)
- Offer a limited selection of medications for sale, mostly controlled substances
- Are willing to deliver drugs to a post office box or other location to avoid detection by authorities
- Deceptively and inaccurately advise about the law and why it is permissible to obtain controlled pharmaceutical substances from foreign countries via the internet

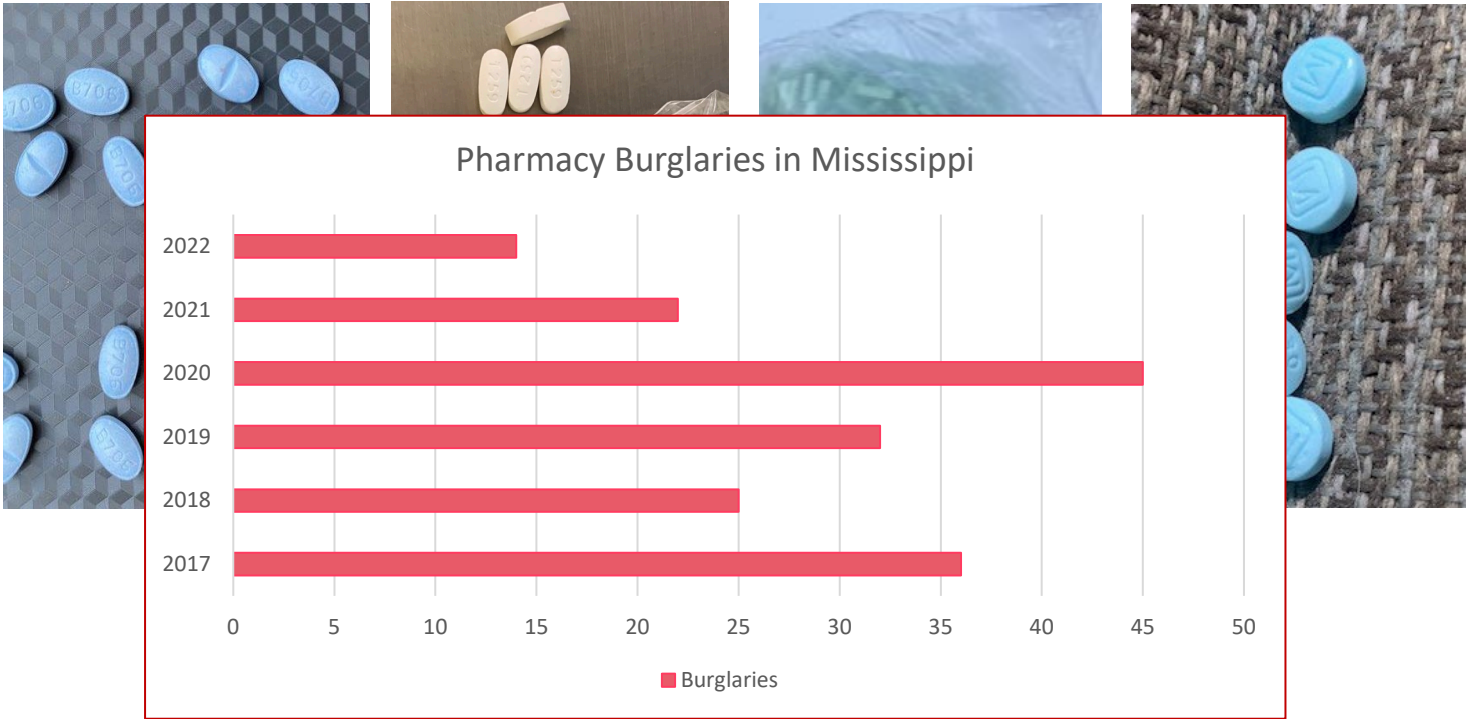
MBN continues working alongside the DEA and other government entities to combat the illegal distribution of pharmaceuticals in the state from sources located within or outside of the United States' borders.

Alternate means of illegal acquisition aside from Internet Pharmacies includes acquisition from pharmacies and non-pharmacies in Mexico and southwest border towns. These options of obtaining desired pharmaceuticals are hazardous because the drug is possibly contaminated, expired, counterfeit, or otherwise unsafe. To drive that point home, it has been reported in the media that Mexican pharmacies are selling counterfeit pills in popular tourist destinations.

Legitimate or Counterfeit Medications: Can you identify the pills manufactured in a sterile, FDA-regulated or approved environment or as counterfeit? Neither can we and it's not a trick question.

ASSOCIATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Pharmacy burglaries, armed robberies of pharmacies, healthcare fraud, and other criminal activity is directly associated with pharmaceutical drug diversion. The most common criminal activity is prescription forgery and fraud, as well as “doctor shopping”, whereas the medications are from pharmacies with legitimate supply chains with less overall risk. Due to the increase in technology and collective experience, criminals exploit the manners in which citizens legally get medicines from pharmacies from simple, time proven methods to manufacturing authentic-looking



Pharmacy Burglaries Reported to MBN from 2017-2022

prescriptions. Both of which have been found to successfully achieve unlawful acquisitions. If medications are not obtained from the legitimate supply chain, what kind of pills are really being obtained? Are the pills stolen from pharmacies, the wholesale drug distributors, imported from non-U.S. regulated entities, or counterfeit?

Local independent dealers and abusers, who might be one and the same, commit crimes against property, such as burglary and theft. These individuals burglarize pharmacies and the homes of legitimate prescription holders to obtain drugs. Pharmacy employees also are known to steal products directly from the shelves, to self-medicate or provide to drug dealers. Intrastate and Interstate criminal groups are involved in drug-targeted burglaries. The threat of diverted pharmaceutical medication is enhanced through drug-targeted burglaries and robberies, which adds threats of violence and acts of violence into the mix. Let's review pharmacy burglaries and armed robberies, crimes against property.

Drug-targeted pharmacy burglaries, or break-ins, occur during hours when the business is closed, whereas criminals are anticipating a non-confrontational environment to take what is desired. In

2022, 14 Mississippi pharmacies were burglarized, whereas two were attempts and entry was not made. Five (5) of them had successful entry but resulted in no loss of medications. This is a decrease from 2021 when 22 Mississippi pharmacies were burglarized, whereas nine (9) were documented as entries not made. Forty-five (45) drug-targeted pharmacy burglaries were reported in 2020, whereas fifteen were deemed as attempts only. Looking back a few more years, 32 pharmacies were reported to have been burglarized in 2019, 25 burglaries in 2018, and 36 burglaries in 2017. Drug-targeted pharmacy burglaries also ebb and flow with trends and drug availability. It may be a utilized option when street quantities are low and worth the risk to obtain any quantity of desirable medications. MBN continues to educate pharmacy employees about best practices to reduce pharmacy burglaries across the state.

We have explored crimes against property, so it would be shortsighted to overlook crimes against persons. Armed robbery of a pharmacy adds the threat and use of violence to a very volatile situation. Armed robberies are acts of desperation, which speaks for itself. It is important to recognize that drug-targeted armed robberies are rare, but they have and do occur in Mississippi. The continued shortage of prescription opioids, as well as, other prescription medications, such as stimulants, forces individuals to make decisions that impact the associated crime and violence as it pertains to pharmaceutical diversion. Pharmacy burglaries and armed robberies are expected to remain a means for abusers and local dealers to obtain quantities of these desired medications.

Furthermore, additional elements of crimes against persons essentially come in the form of assault and murder. The abuser can be a victim of these crimes and the perpetrator. Abusers who take pills that come from a plethora of potential sources and locales, or even engaged in criminal drug activity, could become the victim of the most serious crime, murder. Abusers, and dealers, who use deadly force against others can become the most notorious criminal, a murderer. Law enforcement officers, particularly MBN Agents, understand the danger of pharmaceutical diversion investigations and do not discount the abusers' and drug dealers' ability to use deadly force against those enforcing the law.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation of diverted pharmaceuticals is usually by privately owned vehicles and parcel service businesses. MBN continues to be involved in interdiction stop investigations involving diverted pharmaceuticals. In 2021, MBN was involved in 729 interdiction stops that 114 resulted in the seizures of diverted pharmaceuticals. Similarly, 88 out of 577 stops resulted in the seizure of diverted pharmaceuticals in 2020. During 2019, MBN was involved in 664 interdiction stops that 112 resulted in the seizure of diverted pharmaceuticals. Similarly, 101 out of 616 interdiction stops in 2018 resulted in the seizure of diverted pharmaceuticals. As holding true with prior years, MBN has also intercepted numerous packages and seized pharmaceuticals from the United States Postal Service, Federal Express, United Parcel Service and other parcel services in 2022.

DISTRIBUTION

Most diverted pharmaceuticals in Mississippi continue to be for individual use, especially when involving self-medicating by healthcare professionals and others. Sometimes, these individuals

sell medications that are obtained through legitimate and diverted means to supplement and/or finance their own illicit drug habit(s). While other individuals, deliberately and intentionally, sell quantities of lawfully obtained medications to supplement their income and “make ends meet” while living on a fixed income. Abusers also obtain pharmaceuticals through pain clinics throughout the state. While MBN is seeing a decrease in the number of general practitioners’ issuing opioid prescriptions, the prescriptions written by doctors at pain management clinics has increased substantially. Whether working traditional street drugs or pharmaceuticals, criminal investigators seek to identify and make prosecutable cases on those involved in illicit drug distribution. Sometimes, the sources of supply are those who are unsuspecting. Through available resources, such as the prescription monitoring program (PMP) and interactions with professionals in all aspects of the medical community, law enforcement officers identify problematic prescribers and the most desired drugs. An increasing number of bad actors are utilizing fraudulently manufactured prescriptions, identifying individuals who will accommodate unethical and illegal behavior, and profiting from the acquisition of increased quantities of legitimate medications from the regulated supply chain. The continued shortage of prescription opioids, as well as, other prescription medications, such as stimulants, is forcing some addicts to turn to the street to obtain prescription medications, which have a higher probability of being laced with fentanyl or other substances and can be deadly. Pharmaceutical diversion will continue, but the resolve of those who investigate these crimes doesn’t diminish. This statewide abuse of opioids and other pharmaceutically manufactured controlled substances and associated diversion activity has forced law enforcement throughout the state to revise their training, policies, and procedures to mitigate this deadly epidemic.

MARIJUANA

ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT

Marijuana remains the most trafficked, widely abused, and readily available illicit drug in Mississippi. An ever-relaxing public perception about marijuana use and dangers, apparent mainstream support for marijuana reform or legalization, and a wider variety of products containing marijuana creates an atmosphere that marijuana is generally harmless to everyone. Through these perceptions, society is becoming more desensitized to its use, abuse, and dangers. Marijuana continues to be considered a “gateway” to the world of illicit drug abuse. Law enforcement and treatment professionals can attest to this statement. Public perception impacts the prosecution of crimes and marijuana is becoming more difficult to prosecute. Drug traffickers and drug distributors continue to stay infatuated with marijuana, marijuana products, and profits that can be generated from mass distribution with limited risk for jail time.

According to a report of State Medical Cannabis Laws found on the National Conference of State Legislatures (www.ncsl.org) website, 37 states have passed legislation approving the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes. Mississippi became the 37th state on February 2, 2022. From available information, 21 states and the District of Columbia have legalized recreational marijuana use, which includes Colorado, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. Marijuana, whether imported from Mexico or grown domestically, continues to be abused across the country, including in Mississippi. Additionally, the National Institutes of Health report that medical marijuana use has increased in adults among states with and without medical marijuana programs. Mississippi continues to be the recipient of marijuana being sent from states that have medical marijuana programs or legalized marijuana, particularly California and Oklahoma, but also includes other states. Processed marijuana is the most prevalent form identified, but vapes, gummies, and other marijuana products continue to increase. In addition to marijuana being brought in from outside of Mississippi’s geographic boundaries, marijuana is illegally grown across the state.



Seized in Neshoba County, MS in 2022.

Further evaluation of marijuana and violence revealed that law enforcement officers continue to encounter individuals involved in criminal drug activity to be in possession of an assortment of firearms, ranging from handguns to assault rifles. Moreover, law enforcement officers routinely encounter individuals in possession of firearms while in possession of user amounts of marijuana, as well as larger quantities intended for distribution. As laws become less restrictive, the cultivation, trafficking, and illicit use of marijuana will continue to have negative impacts on many aspects of our lives, ranging from personal health and public health to the safety and security of our communities, state, and even our nation. Let’s look at marijuana in our communities.

ABUSE

Nationwide, marijuana use transcends all ethnic, social, and economic boundaries. Some begin drug abuse as a youth while others start as young adults. Yet, others begin between 26-45 years old. There are many reasons why individuals begin a journey of drug abuse, but it often begins with marijuana. Marijuana, which continues to see a decline in the public's perception of its harmful effects, isn't seen as safe to research entities and other organizations, such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and others. These groups are concerned about public health and provide valuable datasets in brochures, pamphlets, and other resources.

Trends in abuse can be reflected through multiple facets, such as substance abuse statistics along with law enforcement seizures and arrests information. Let's look at treatment data first. According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 18.7% of the people 12 years or older used marijuana in the past year in the 2021 study. The highest percentage among young adults was 35.4%, whereas young adults were considered 18-25 years old. The middle percentage bracket, 17.2%, included adults aged 26 or older. The lowest percentage was found in adolescents aged 12 to 17 at 10.5%. Based on data reviewed from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute on Drug Abuse and SAMHSA, these numbers stayed about level to other recent years.

Law enforcement and mental health advocates are interested in current trends of abuse. Monitoring the Future National Survey on Drug Use, a long-term research initiative at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, gathers data on adolescents in eighth grade, tenth grade, and twelfth grade pertaining to a wide range of drug use. The survey seeks answers to self-reported drug use in categories that include lifetime, past 12 months, and past 30 days. This is valuable data for trends, in some cases for over 40 years. According to monitoringthefuture.org, 38.3% of high school seniors admitted to using marijuana in their lifetime, while 30.7% admitted to using marijuana in the past year, and 20.2% admitted to using in the past month in the 2022 survey. Eleven percent (11%) of eighth graders admitted to using marijuana in their lifetime, 8.3% reported using marijuana in the past year, and 5% admitted to using in the past month. An important dataset is the tenth graders due to decrease from 2020 to 2021 and an increase in the 2022 survey. For instance, this group decreased 33.3% to 22% in the lifetime category, from 28% to 17.3% in the past year, and from 16.6% to 10.1% in the past 30 days. The 2022 survey indicated the following datasets for this age group increased in the three categories: lifetime (24.2%), past twelve months (19.5%), and last thirty days (12.1%). This survey also included survey results for those students admitting to vaping marijuana, which showed an increase in all categories. The use reported use among all groups increased particularly in the use in the last 30 days, which was identified as being statistically significant for eighth graders and seniors.



Seized in Itawamba, MS in 2022.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, three (3) out of ten (10) individuals suffer from marijuana addiction, typically referred to as Marijuana Use Disorder or Cannabis Use Disorder. This disorder is characterized by not being able to stop using marijuana even though it is causing health or social problems. Those who begin using marijuana as a youth will likely develop this disorder over those who start using marijuana later in life. Like any substance that is misused or abused, it will affect life in one or more area, such as with work or in a legal realm. Individuals seek treatment for substance abuse for specific reasons. According to the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, 189 individuals were admitted for marijuana abuse as a primary substance in 2022. Of these 189 people admitted, 53%, or 101 individuals, were between the ages of 26 to 45. 38 individuals were between under the age of 18 while 36 people between the ages of 19 were admitted for treatment. Only 14 people were admitted for treatment ages 46 and older. The dataset for those seeking treatment for marijuana use, behind a secondary substance, increased by over 100 individuals from that of the primary group. Of the 309 people admitted, 59%, or 185 individuals, reported marijuana use as a problem substance. Fifty-seven (57) participants, between 19 to 25 years old, were admitted for marijuana being a secondary substance, while 59 individuals, 46 years old and older sought treatment. A third reported group, referred to as the tertiary substance, was comprised of 144 people were admitted to treatment. Of the 144 people, 12 belonged in the 19-25 age group, 95 individuals fell between the ages of 26 to 45, and 37 belonged to the 46 and older age group. Typically, a life event pre-empts treatment, which may be short-lived or long lasting. The number of individuals admitted into treatment varies greatly from year to year, possibly due to it being a very specific decision made by the drug abuser to want *and* seek help.



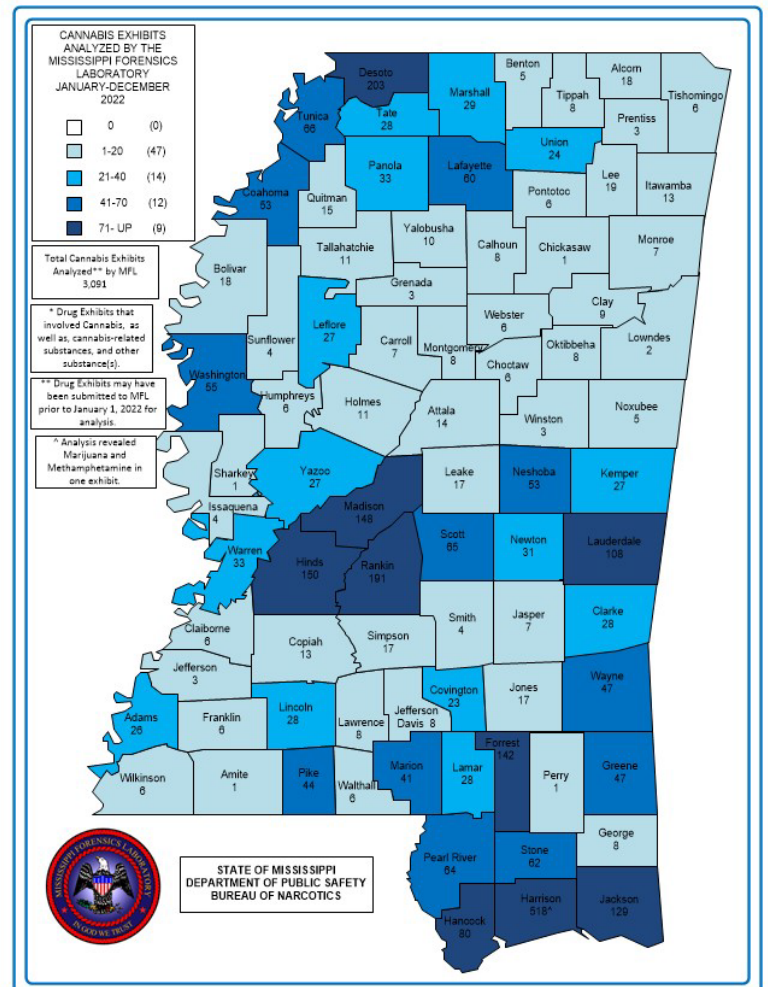
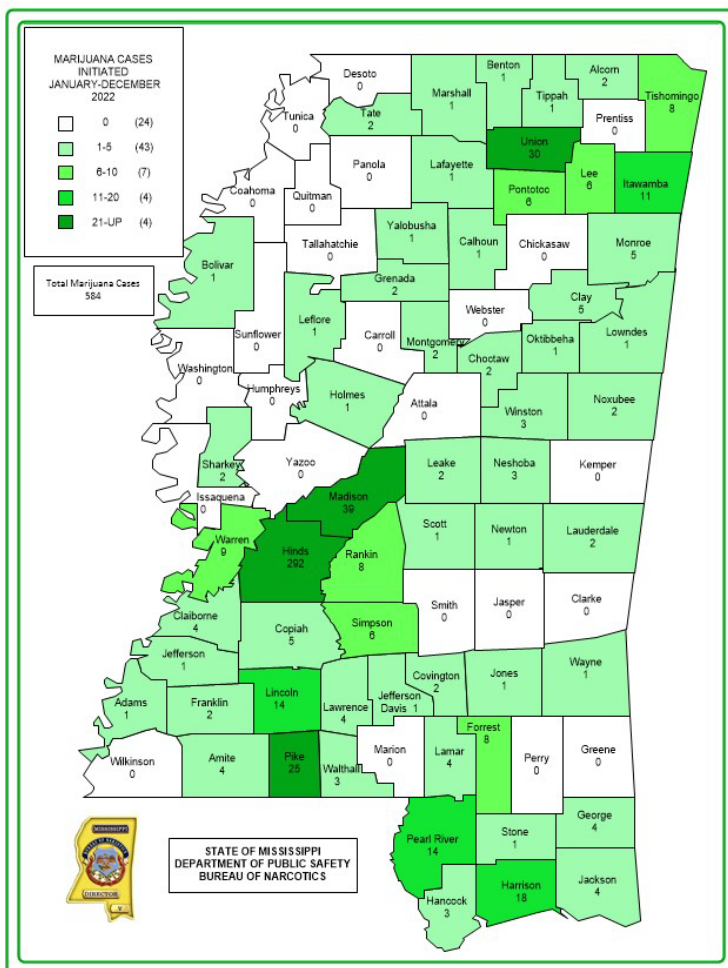
Seized in Benton County, MS in 2022.

Aside from stats and figures, sometimes practical, real-world situations cause alarm to parents and others. Examples may include what can be perceived through the five senses. Odors associated with marijuana, either raw or smoked, can be routinely identified in public settings, such as retail stores, convenience stores, associated and adjacent parking lots, and other locations, which can correlate with abuse. These situations can be hard topics to discuss, but through the odors and questions, conversations can be initiated about drug use and abuse.

Another avenue of approach to monitor the marijuana scene in Mississippi can be captured by reviewing Mississippi Forensics Laboratory analysis conducting during calendar year 2022. During this period, the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory Drug Section analyzed approximately 3,091 exhibits containing cannabis and cannabis related substances. Additionally, the Drug Section analyzed at least one exhibit from each of

Mississippi's 82 counties.

In 2022, MBN seized approximately 1,717 pounds of processed marijuana and additional quantities of marijuana products, over 286 marijuana plants, and initiated 584 cases involving marijuana in 58 out of 82 counties for the year. Additional plants were reported to MBN as being seized by local sheriff and police departments. MBN arrested 245 individuals in 2022 for marijuana violations. MBN seized approximately 1,188 pounds of processed marijuana and 451 plants in 2021. An additional 392 plants were reported to MBN as being seized by local departments. In 2020, MBN seized approximately 331 pounds of processed marijuana and marijuana products, over 320 plants, and initiated 396 cases involving marijuana for the year. MBN seized approximately 834 pounds of processed marijuana and initiated 788 cases involving marijuana in 2019. During the years 2019, 2020, and 2021, MBN made 287, 235, and 227 arrests for marijuana violations, respectively. As with other drugs, the number of marijuana seizures fluctuates in Mississippi. This variation is due in part to marijuana being diverted from other states where it's legal and permitting its use for medical purposes. Review the maps below regarding drug seizures and analysis in Mississippi during 2022 for a visualization of marijuana's prevalence in the state.



Left Image: MBN Initiated Investigations Involving Marijuana in 2022; Right Image: Mississippi Forensics Laboratory Data on Marijuana Exhibits Associated with Counties as Analyzed During 2022.

AVAILABILITY

In the United States, marijuana continues to be ranked as the most readily available illicit drug. Data from the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Survey indicates 87% of law enforcement in Mississippi rank the availability of marijuana as high. While 54% indicated the availability of marijuana as increasing. Furthermore, 95% of the Mississippi law enforcement survey respondents indicated an increase in encounters with edible products containing marijuana, referred to as Edibles. Similarly, 85% of respondents indicated that Vape Pens and Cartridges are becoming more commonly encountered since January 1, 2022. With regard to High Grade Medicinal Marijuana, 77% of the survey respondents indicated that the amount encountered remains the same from the previous year. In review of the datasets, 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey Mississippi participants almost equally answered the drug trafficking attributes of availability, demand, distribution, and transport as increasing or staying the same. According to Gulf Coast HIDTA, Law Enforcement respondents indicated that high-grade hydroponic and domestic marijuana were encountered more than any other type. These two types are followed by Medicinal, BC Bud, and Mexican strains of marijuana. Law enforcement continues to encounter marijuana, ranging from low and mid-grade to high grade, high potency varieties.

Prices for marijuana vary based on the quality, potency, geographic region where it was produced and whether it's in flower, wax, or edible form. Marijuana's price point is also impacted by the location of purchase. If the product is purchased on the southwest border or from a source state, the prices are lower than when the product is delivered to the distribution location. With that said, prices for average marijuana in Mississippi range from \$500 to \$1,200 per pound. Higher quality marijuana prices range from \$3,000 to \$7,000 per pound in Mississippi.

After a petition ballot initiative was overturned by the court and the Legislature authored a measure that would meet the signing hand of the Governor to allow medicinal marijuana, Mississippi became the 37th state in the Union to have authorized the use of marijuana for certain medical conditions, which was signed in February 2022. This allows marijuana to be grown, processed, and dispensed in the state as prescribed by law. Recently, the first medicinal marijuana under this law has been sold as dispensaries continue to be more visible around the state. As other states have seen upon implementing recreational use or medical use marijuana, there will be an uptick in its availability, as processed marijuana, edibles, vapes, and other consumable products are legally sold. As Mississippi Medical Cannabis Program is in its infancy and continues to expand, Mississippi will feel growing pangs. With high quality marijuana being available in the state, it is anticipated that individuals will employ ways to divert it from its intended purpose into the illicit market.

ASSOCIATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Violent crime is not generally associated with marijuana, particularly among users. However, some marijuana producers and distributors will submit to threats of violence or violent crimes to protect their product. Cannabis growers, for example, will often resort to counter-surveillance, trip wires, and explosives to protect their crop from theft or seizure. Marijuana retail distributors

have been known to carry weapons to protect their merchandise and to guard against potential robberies during marijuana transactions. Mississippi law enforcement officers are encountering more and more individuals who are in possession of weapons while in possession of illegal drugs, to include marijuana. As depicted below, a variety of weapons have been encountered when dealing with individuals involved with marijuana. Most, but not all, weapons were located during investigations involving the distribution of marijuana.



Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.



Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.



Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.



Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.



Encountered in Jackson County, MS in 2022.

Even though the images depicted above appear to be predominantly from a particular area of the state, law enforcement officers routinely encounter individuals with firearms during drug investigations and other lawful encounters, ranging from simple possession to distribution all over the state. Firearms are becoming more and more prevalent, and they add a dimension to the marijuana drug culture that must be anticipated.

PRODUCTION

The production of marijuana is expensive in terms of time, resources, and environmental effects. Producing quality marijuana is expensive no matter the intended end user. Growing plants takes time, money, and effort for successful cultivation. Almost all horticulture growers take pride in the product that is being grown at their hands. Similarly, illicit marijuana production also involves time and resources by law enforcement to minimize these grows and the accompanying issues. Whether grown indoors, outdoors, hybrid, hydroponically, illicitly, or commercially, marijuana consumers and growers alike want the best products available. Mississippi now has added medical cannabis to commercially grown hemp that is being produced throughout the state. Let's unpack illicit cultivation techniques which essentially equate to indoor and outdoor grow operations, referred to as "grows". Generally, these grows can be quite simple to very elaborate and sophisticated. Law enforcement officers have located indoor and outdoor grows during calendar year 2022.



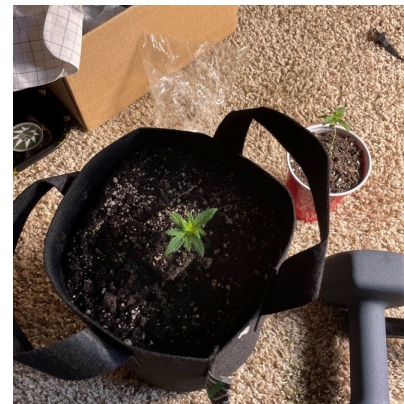
Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.



Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.

Indoor cultivations, or grows, typically require diligent oversight. Growers must provide their crops with light, heat, humidity, and fertilizer. Sophisticated hydroponic grow operations can closets, single rooms, garages, and encompass an entire residential structure. Elaborate grows have particular areas assigned for the stages of illicit production. These types of grows expose Mississippi law enforcement officers of the complexity of indoor grows essentially those operating like a business and producing commercial quality products concealed in the community. These operations create a hazardous environment, ranging from fire hazards, mold hazards, and others. Less sophisticated operations incorporate plants being grown in buckets and other gardening apparatus and being moved between outdoor cultivation and indoor cultivation.

As these three photographs depict (left, top right, and bottom right), these grows can be very simple to more sophisticated regardless of where they are located. Law enforcement officers have found illicit grows concealed in closets, garages, single rooms, and multi-room setups. Indoor marijuana grows also impact individual health, as well as public health due to the environment necessary to grow plants. These operations create a hazardous environment, ranging from fire, mold, and other hazards. Indoor grow operations also employ sophisticated means of production and concealment. Organizations often



Seized in Hinds County, MS in 2022.

purchase homes in neighborhoods with mid to high level income residents. Residential indoor operations are capable of producing marijuana crops four or more times in one year.



Seized in Franklin County, MS in 2022.

Outdoor cannabis cultivation operations enable a grower to have options to conceal their crop from law enforcement. MBN's Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) primarily focuses on outdoor grows, ranging from one plant to multi-acre plots of illicit crop. Drug law enforcement officers have found plants grown sporadically in backyards, mixed with tomato plants and other vegetables in gardens, as well as planted in portable buckets.

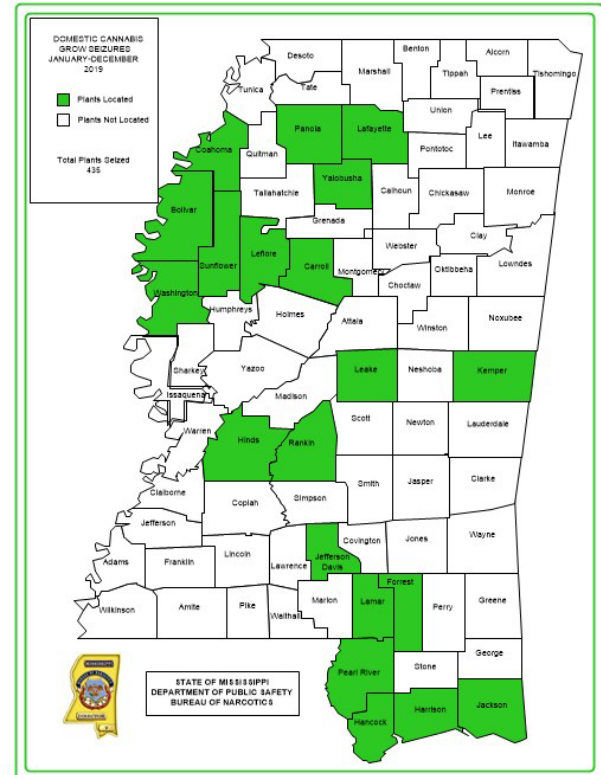
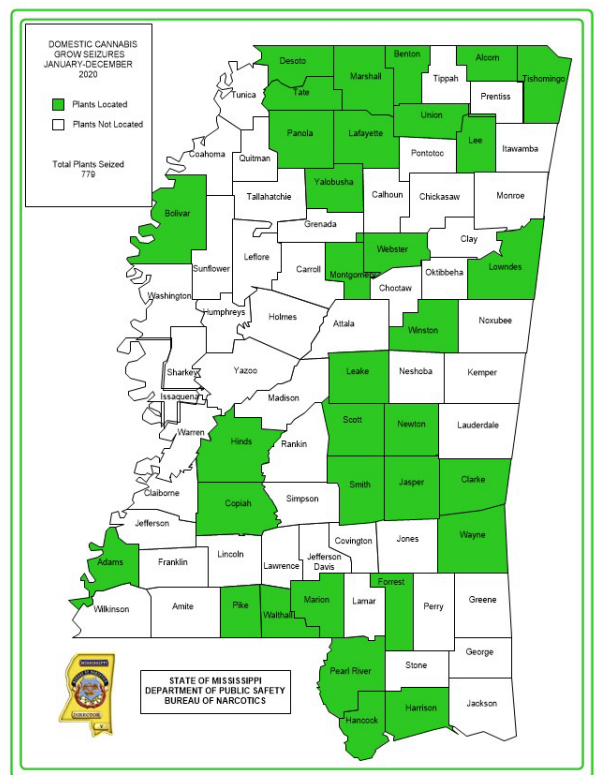
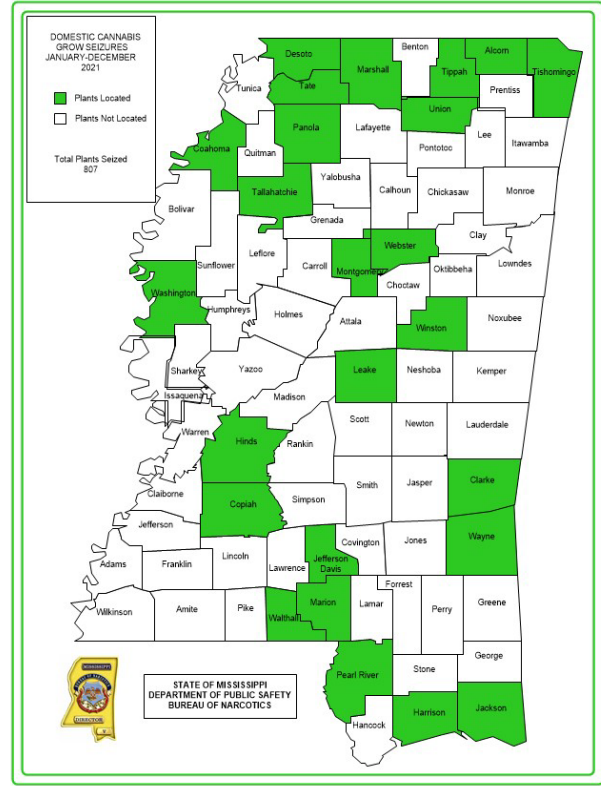
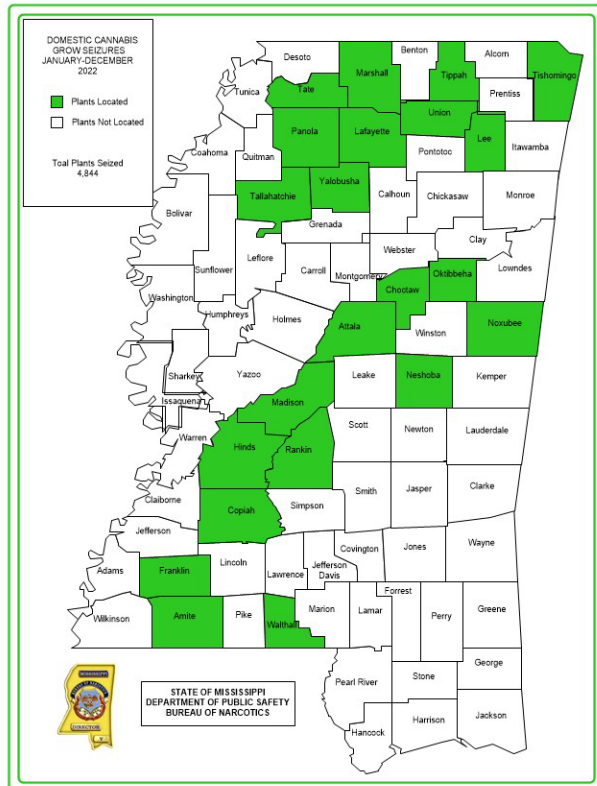
Secluded cultivation sites can negatively impact the quality of the environment, through chemical fertilizer applications, pollution of ground water and streams through mixing of waste and runoff waters, along with refuse. Although not encountered in 2022 as in previous years, Mexican DTOs continue to use sophisticated methods of cultivation. Workers are required to live on-site and tend to the crop daily. DTOs utilize elaborate irrigation systems, water pumps, hoses, portable sprayers, portable gas generators, and advanced chemical fertilizer

applications.

In 2022, MBN's Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) seized marijuana plants from outdoor grow operations in 22 of Mississippi's 82 counties. The Mississippi National Guard and the Mississippi Department of Public Safety Airwing assist MBN in these operations. Additionally, MBN was notified about seizures of marijuana plants made by Mississippi law enforcement aside from the above-mentioned operations. Through these efforts, 4,844 marijuana plants were seized during the calendar year. The most recent available data published for Fiscal Year 2021 by DEA reflects that forty-three outdoor grow sites, five indoor grow sites, 942 plants, 2,748 pounds of processed marijuana, 146 ounces of THC wax, 66 ounces of THC edibles, and eighty-nine arrests were reported in Mississippi.

With regulated outdoor cultivation of industrial hemp and legalized indoor medicinal marijuana production, MBN's Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program unit continues to evolve to the times. The changes present challenges that impact enforcement efforts, but through continued efforts and expanded partnerships illicitly grown marijuana will continue to be identified, investigated, and ultimately seized to protect public health and promote public safety.

Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics



Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program enforcement operations are grow-season time intensive initiatives with a storied history of a partnership between MBN, Drug Enforcement Administration, Mississippi National Guard, and local law enforcement. As the maps indicate, illicit marijuana grow operations are routinely located throughout the state. Resources, weather, and other challenges routinely impact where illegally cultivated marijuana plants are identified and seized during the growing season.

TRANSPORTATION

Marijuana continues to be transported into and through Mississippi, which includes varieties of domestically grown, Mexico-produced, and high-potency Canadian marijuana. As previously mentioned, Mississippi is the crossroads of the South and illicit drugs enter the state on its roadways as a means for marijuana to arrive at its intended markets inside the state and beyond.

Mexico-produced marijuana enters the country primarily in Arizona, California, and south Texas, while high-potency Canadian marijuana is usually smuggled through and between points of entry in Washington, Michigan, New York, and Vermont. Both forms of marijuana are distributed nationally. Similarly, domestically produced marijuana is transported from grow sites to markets nationwide.



Seized in Itawamba County, MS in 2022.

Mississippi continues to be a major trans-shipment point for bulk marijuana from the Southwest Border. According to the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Survey, Mississippi



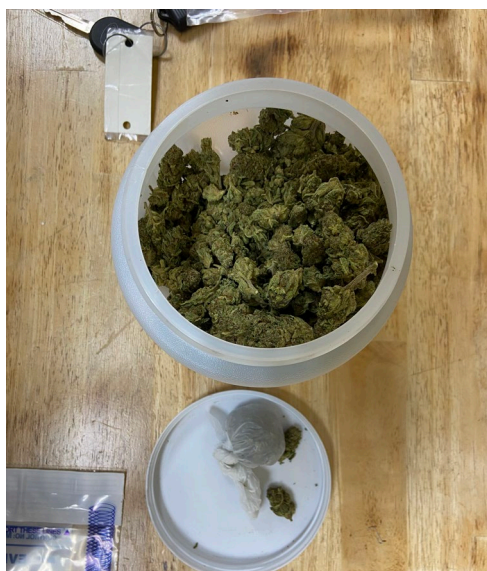
Seized in Lamar County, MS in 2022.

respondents reported marijuana products continue to be seized, which includes processed marijuana and increases in the quantity of vape pens and edibles encountered. Seizures primarily occurred from individuals traveling on I-10 and I-20. The primary source states for marijuana trafficked through Mississippi are western states with legalized marijuana, to include California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, and Oklahoma, as well as Texas. Additionally, Drug traffickers are using I-22 as a route from the western states. The proceeds from this traffic are returned to Mexico through Mississippi via I-10, I-59, I-55, and I-20. Additionally, Drug traffickers are using I-22 as a route to and from the western states. Parcel delivery is also a popular avenue for drug traffickers to utilize for transporting drugs. Fifty-two percent of Mississippi law enforcement respondents to the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Survey reported that the transportation of marijuana increased in 2022 while

forty-eight percent of the Mississippi law enforcement respondents reported that marijuana transportation remained steady. Based on this survey, marijuana, especially vape pens and edibles, continues to be a concern for Mississippi law enforcement officers.

DISTRIBUTION

According to the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA threat assessment survey, law enforcement respondents in Mississippi reported the distribution of marijuana either remained the same or increased. Marijuana produced in the United States is trafficked into Mississippi, from states where production is legal. Private and rented vehicles remain the preferred method of transportation for marijuana; however, drug traffickers often use commercial semi-trucks and tractor trailers. Law enforcement in Mississippi have encountered commercial semi-trucks transporting loads of 100 to 1,000-kilogram quantities. Marijuana is distributed by all socio-economic classes ranging from street level dealers to major distributors.



Seized in Choctaw County, MS in 2022.

Mexican produced marijuana is transported into the United States across the southwest border while smaller quantities are often trafficked from Canada. Marijuana produced in Mexico is considered “low grade” and of lesser quality than marijuana produced in the United States and Canada. Warehouses along the southwest border are often used to store foreign-produced marijuana once it enters the U.S. The United States Custom and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations seized approximately 157,797 pounds of marijuana during fiscal year (FY) 2022 (October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021). In comparison, CBP seized approximately 319,447 pounds of marijuana in FY 2021 and approximately 257,440 pounds in FY 2020. This decrease may be associated with the availability of domestically produced marijuana as more states legalize marijuana for medicinal use and/or recreational use. This

decrease may also be attributed to change in focus on drugs being smuggled across the southwest border, as cocaine and fentanyl seizure numbers have increased.

TRENDS

Marijuana will continue to be one of the most available and the most widely abused illicit drug in Mississippi. As law enforcement has seen, the movement to legalize medical and recreational marijuana has increased the availability of high potency, or high grade, products within those states enacting this legislation, as well as states that become entangled in being the intended destination in the illicit distribution of these drugs. Aside from the high potency marijuana being illegally transported, distributed, and abused in Mississippi derived from other states and international sources, the legalization of medical marijuana in Mississippi will likely lead to an increase in abuse and availability of diverted products within the state. With the Mississippi Medical Cannabis Program becoming operational, drug trafficking organizations and independent criminals will try to find ways to exploit the rules and regulations of this program to divert the locally produced marijuana. Furthermore, it is very plausible that Mississippi’s medical marijuana program will be exploited, and Mississippi will become a source state for states that do not have legalized medical or recreational marijuana. This is a trend that has been

experienced in other states with medical cannabis programs. In Oklahoma and other states, marijuana seizures have been reported to increase after the program went into effect.

As the domestic production of cannabis continues to rise, new concerns regarding THC potency and marijuana fused products will continue to emerge in Mississippi. A high demand for high-grade marijuana, marijuana concentrates, and trendy vaping-devices will continue to play a role in enticing users across the state. Based on knowledge gained from other states with similar programs, Mississippi law enforcement will work to mitigate nefarious activity associated with marijuana.

MARIJUANA PICTURE – TABLE AND CONTENTS.... WHERE DID IT COME FROM

POWDER AND CRACK COCAINE

ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT

Cocaine, the rave of the 80's and 90's, seemed to have lost fame in the early 2000's when Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations expanded their interests in methamphetamine and later heroin. Mississippi law enforcement officers observed the transition of cocaine users switching to methamphetamine as local drug distributors initiated this transition to some extent due to cocaine price and availability. Although not as prevalent as methamphetamine, cocaine remains a drug threat in Mississippi due to its high addiction rate, associated violence, and its affiliation with gangs and drug cartels. Powder cocaine and crack cocaine remain available to Mississippians. Most of the cocaine in Mississippi is transported by American and Mexican DTOs via Texas and the Southwest Border states and distributed by criminal groups, street gangs, and independent dealers. During the past couple of years, cocaine has been found on the beaches of each state along the Gulf of Mexico, including Mississippi. From available information, significant quantities of cocaine have washed up on the shorelines of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. In August 2022, fifteen (15) one-kilogram bricks of cocaine, suspected to be 33 pounds, washed up on the shores of the Mississippi Gulf Coast in Harrison County, believed to have been off-loaded in the Mississippi Sound. Although MBN cocaine case numbers are low, cocaine remains a dangerous and problematic drug in communities and for law enforcement across the state. The use and/or sale of cocaine can be linked directly and indirectly to crimes, especially violent crimes. MBN continues to devote resources to cocaine investigations, whereas the presence of cocaine appears to be re-emerging after a decline over the past decade.

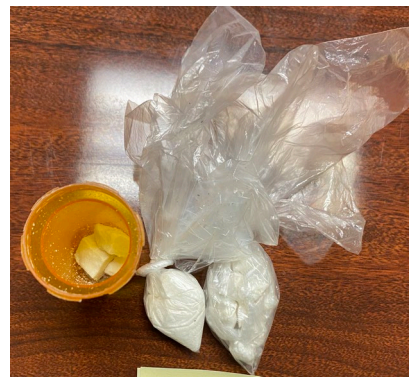


Seized in Harrison County, MS in 2022.

ABUSE

In Mississippi, cocaine is illicitly trafficked and abused by people from all racial and socioeconomic groups in most, if not all the state's 82 counties. Crack cocaine remains the drug of choice among users and traffickers in the African American population in both urban and rural areas of Mississippi; however, the use and abuse of cocaine is not limited to any one geographic area or ethnic group. To this point, MBN initiated investigations involving cocaine in 44 of the state's 82 counties, as reflected in the map on Page 59. These 44 counties were sporadically located throughout the nine enforcement districts, or regions, of the state.

Cocaine abuse can be viewed by the exhibits that are analyzed by the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory (MFL) during 2022. As represented on the map on Page 59, the MFL Drug Section analyzed approximately 818 exhibits during 2022, which may have been submitted to the lab prior to January 1, 2022. These cocaine exhibits were seized in 66 counties. Most of the cocaine examined was merely cocaine, however, some of the exhibits contained a combination of cocaine and another substance or substances, including methamphetamine, fentanyl, and heroin. Further analysis of the data is needed to draw a correlation between the combinations containing cocaine and seizure locations and potential sources of supply.



Seized in Noxubee County, MS in 2022.

Another indicator of abuse can be correlated to treatment admissions. Due to the steady abuse of cocaine, the likelihood of seeking treatment for this drug is highly probable due to the consequences of said illicit use. The Mississippi Department of Mental Health reported 195 people were admitted for cocaine abuse as a primary substance in 2022. This is a decrease from 2021 in which 428 individuals were admitted for abuse of cocaine as a primary substance. In 2020, 96 people were admitted for cocaine abuse and 547 individuals were admitted during 2019. Of the 195 people admitted in 2022, 36%, or 71 individuals, were ages 26 to 45. Only seven individuals were between the ages of 19-25, while 47% of individuals treated were between 46-65 years old. Surprisingly, 24 individuals over the age of 65 were admitted for abuse of cocaine as a primary substance. Exploring the data treatment for secondary substance abuse, 132 individuals reported cocaine use behind an undisclosed primary substance. Of these individuals, 36% were ages 26 to 45. Similar to the primary substance data, 10 individuals were between the ages 19-25, while 51 individuals were 46 years old and older. Two individuals, 18 years old or younger, were admitted for cocaine abuse as a secondary substance. The tertiary substance, or third in order, followed the same pattern with the majority being between the ages of 26-45. Forty-eight individuals were admitted for abuse of cocaine as a tertiary substance abuse.

AVAILABILITY

Cocaine is present in Mississippi as indicated by the datapoints previously discussed, as well as by the depictions on the maps on Page 59. Most of the high-level, or wholesale, crack cocaine trade in Mississippi is controlled by African Americans, many of whom are members or affiliates

of groups or gangs such as the “Vice Lords,” “Gangster Disciples,” “Wood Street Players,” the “Four Corner Hustlers,” and the “North End Boys.” Unique to the Mississippi Gulf Coast counties of Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson are the Vietnamese gangs involved in drug trafficking. These Vietnamese gangs, primarily operating in the Biloxi area, are heavily involved in the distribution of powder cocaine and the club drug ecstasy, also known as MDMA, which will be discussed later. The primary cocaine sources for these Vietnamese dealers are located in Texas, Canada, and California. Vietnamese dealers are known to supply some of the African American dealers with powder cocaine, which is then converted into crack cocaine for local sale. Mexican traffickers are loosely organized in Mississippi but are believed to be associated with large Mexican DTOs operating in Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas. Overall, the Mexican population in Mississippi is steadily growing, and the presence of Mexican DTOs is increasing in rural agricultural areas of the state. Let’s look at some numbers pertaining to cocaine.

In 2022, Mississippi saw a slight decrease in the number of cocaine cases from 2021, whereas MBN initiated 175 cases in 2022 and 203 in 2021. Of these cases, 68 were crack cocaine cases and 107 cases involved powder cocaine. In 2021, the Bureau of Narcotics initiated 92 cases involving crack cocaine and 111 involving powder cocaine. MBN initiated 69 cases involving crack cocaine and 97 cases involving powder cocaine, for a total of 166 in 2020. There were 155 cases involving crack and 121 cases involving powder cocaine in 2019 cases. There was a decrease in the amount of cocaine seized in 2022, as compared to 2021. MBN agents purchased or seized approximately 36 pounds of cocaine in 2022, about 88 pounds in 2021, approximately



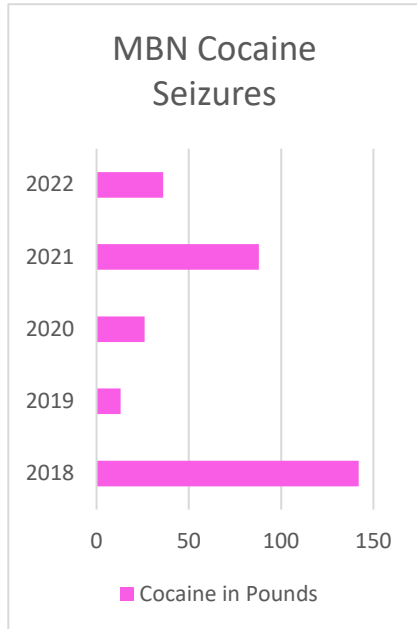
Seized in Neshoba County, MS in 2022.

26 pounds of cocaine during 2020, about 13 pounds in 2019 but purchased or seized approximately 142 pounds in 2018. During 2022, MBN arrested a total of 87 individuals for sale and possession of cocaine. This is a decrease compared to 122 arrests for cocaine in 2021. MBN arrested 182 individuals in 2019 and 143 in 2018. In 2022, the BLOC/Gulf Coast HIDTA Watch Center reported a total of 440 pounds of cocaine seized during 25 traffic stops, primarily from local agency traffic stops on Mississippi interstates and state highways. This was an increase compared to the 190 pounds of cocaine seized during 5 traffic stops in 2021. In comparison, BHWC reported 19 pounds seized in 2020, 108 pounds in 2019, and 206

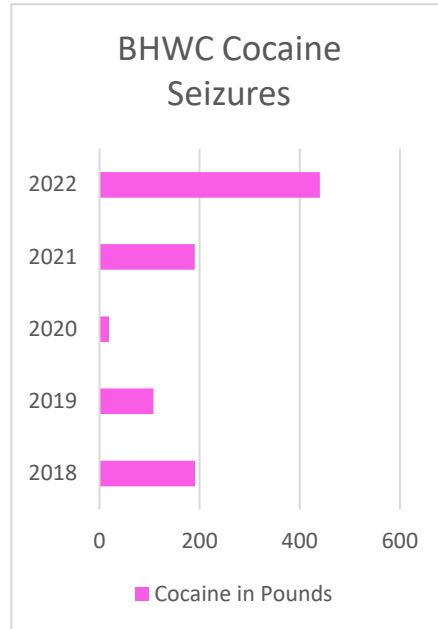
pounds in 2018. The United States Custom and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations seized almost 656,000 pounds of cocaine during fiscal year (FY) 2022 (October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021). In comparison, CBP seized over 913,000 pounds of cocaine in FY 2021 and approximately 1,000,000 pounds in FY 2020. The decrease in cocaine seizures by CBP at the Southwestern border could be attributed to the increase of fentanyl being smuggled into the United States. It could also be attributed to the smugglers attempting to use commercial vessels and private boats instead of passenger vehicles.

Mississippians must endure the presence of cocaine in the state. The availability of cocaine can be reduced by local, state, and federal law enforcement working together on priority targets or geographic regions, such as the cocaine bricks washing up on Mississippi beaches. According

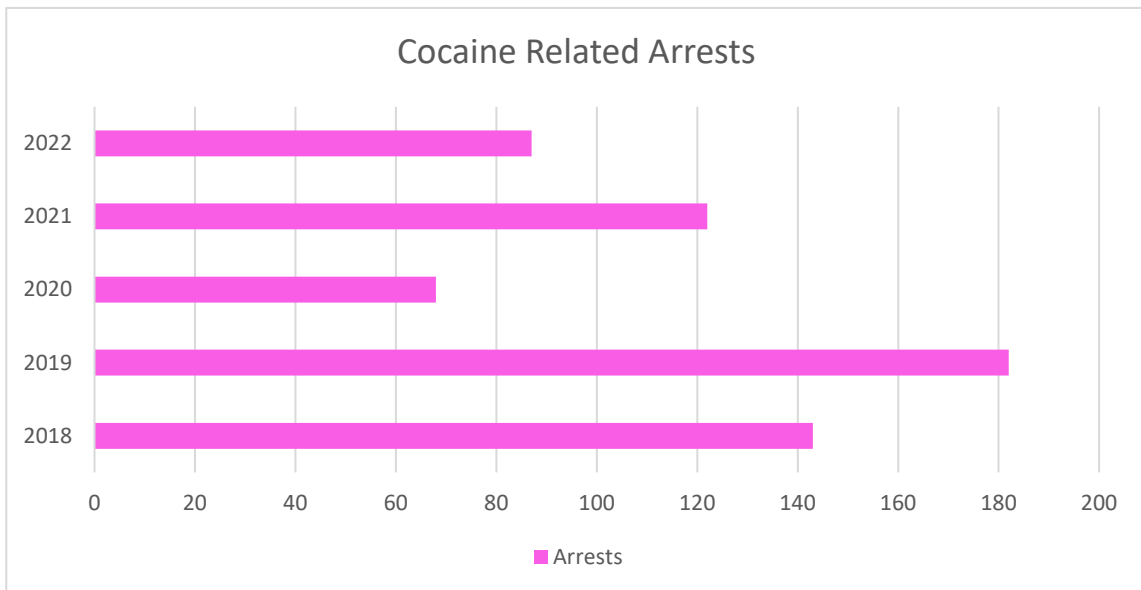
to various media sources, other areas in the states that have direct access to the Gulf of Mexico is not an anomaly.



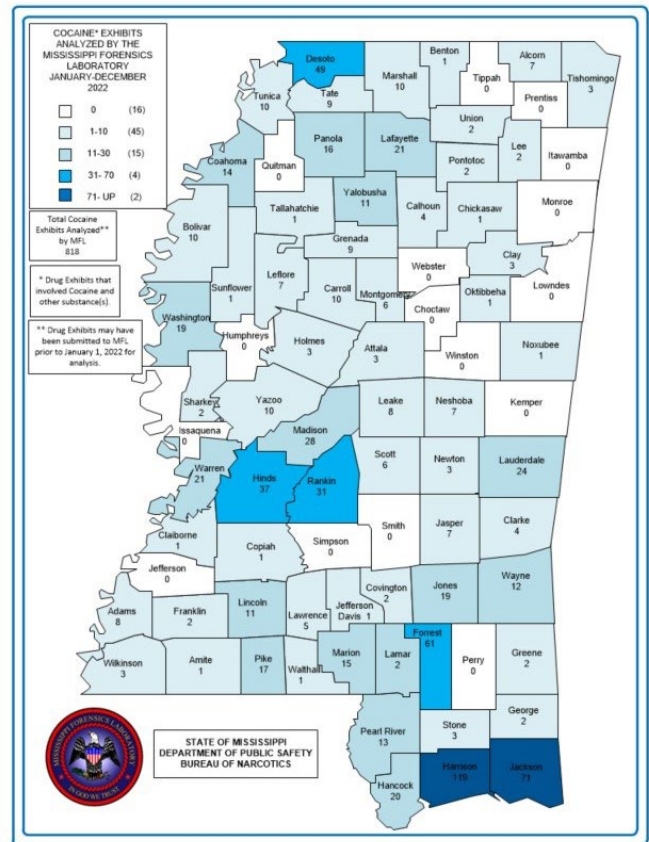
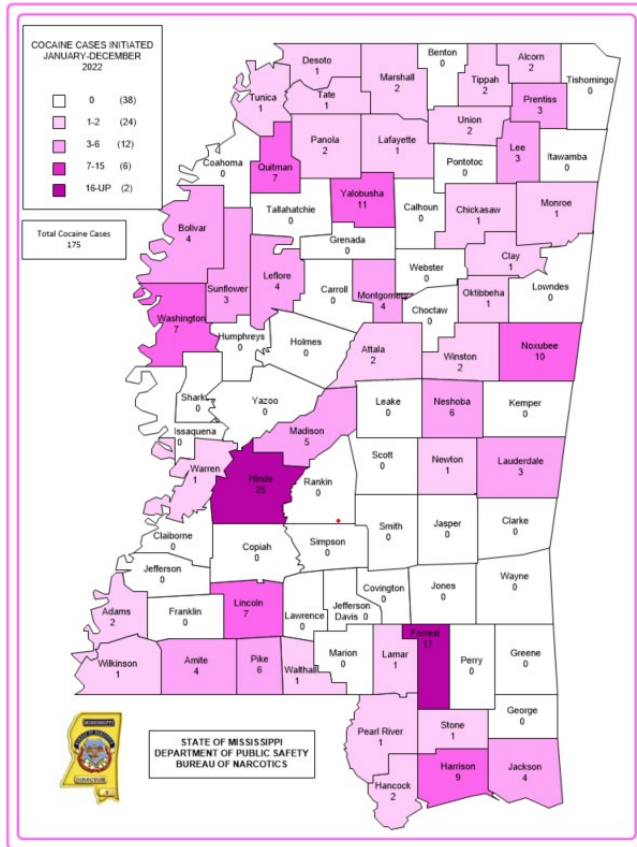
MBN 2018-2022 Stats Regarding Cocaine Seizures



BHCW 2018-2022 Stats Regarding Cocaine Seizures



MBN 2018-2022 Stats for Cocaine-Related Arrests Related



Left Image: MBN Initiated Investigations Involving Cocaine in 2022; Right Image: Mississippi Forensics Laboratory Data on Cocaine Exhibits Associated with Counties as Analyzed During 2022.

ASSOCIATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Crack and powder cocaine are significant problems for Mississippi's residents and law enforcement. Cocaine has been responsible for some violence and criminal activity in Mississippi. Cocaine abusers commit thefts and robberies to fund their addictions. Cocaine retail distributors have been known to carry weapons to protect their merchandise and to guard against potential robberies during cocaine transactions. Mexican cocaine DTOs are reputed to be among the most violent in the world.

PRODUCTION

Cocaine is produced almost exclusively in northern and western South America with Colombia as the main producer of illegal cocaine coming to the United States. Cocaine is not cultivated nor is it produced in Mississippi. Some crack cocaine is transported to Mississippi from neighboring states; however, most crack cocaine is converted locally prior to retail distribution.

TRANSPORTATION

Mexican DTO's dominate cocaine transportation into the United States. Most of the cocaine entering the United States is transported across the Southwest Border via Mexico in kilogram quantities. Most of the cocaine found in Mississippi is primarily transported by Mexican or African American DTOs via Texas and the Southwest Border. In addition to Texas, Georgia and Arizona were deemed as source states. Based on thirteen interdiction stops resulting in the seizure of cocaine, most of the stops were conducted on Interstate 10 and Interstate 20. Cocaine is transported primarily in powder form and is commonly transported from the main source cities of Houston and Dallas to local wholesale distributors in Mississippi, most often via personal vehicles or commercial trucks on I-10, I-55, I-59 and I-20. There are a variety of concealment methods such as false compartments inside the quarter-panels of the vehicles. Additionally, cocaine is often found inside electronically controlled false compartments in vehicles. Cocaine is transported into Mississippi by personal carry-on luggage via commercial and private buses, and through parcel services. Mississippi distributors often travel to Texas to obtain cocaine or rely on the Mexican DTOs through "mules," to deliver cocaine to Mississippi. Los Angeles, Memphis, Chicago, Atlanta, and Miami are secondary source cities for the cocaine found in Mississippi.

DISTRIBUTION

Most of the local distribution in the state is controlled by miscellaneous independent drug trafficking organizations and is transported into the state in 2 to 10-kilogram quantities. Loads of 20 kilograms and greater have been seized in the state, largely bound for Chicago or Atlanta. There is also widespread use of commercial courier services, such as commercial truck lines, independent truckers, and parcel service businesses to transport drugs into the state and ship currency out. A bulk of Mississippi's cocaine supply comes in through Texas.



Seized in Madison County, MS in 2022.

Once cocaine is brought into Mississippi, local suppliers tend to mix or "cut" the cocaine with a variety of substances to increase the amount of the cocaine, which in turn increases their profit. Cocaine dealers then distribute the "cut" cocaine in weights ranging from grams to ounces. Local dealers often convert powder cocaine into crack cocaine to be distributed by street level dealers. Crack cocaine distributors are mostly African Americans, while powder cocaine distributors include Caucasian Americans and other ethnic groups.

HEROIN

ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT

Mississippi Law Enforcement Professionals continue to encounter heroin, but it is on a decline due to the uptick in fentanyl. Heroin continues to be a concern in Mississippi and in surrounding states. According to the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Law Enforcement Survey, 72% of the Mississippi respondents identified heroin's availability as moderate to high. Most of the respondents reported that the demand for heroin remained the same. Heroin, without regard to black tar, white or brown powder, is a dirty drug, usually being injected directly into the bloodstream. Withdrawal symptoms are the same for heroin as prescription pain medications and fentanyl. According to the DEA, white heroin is typically the purest form, followed by brown heroin, and then black tar heroin. Most people who abuse opioids and opiates, including heroin, refer to continuous use as "chasing the dragon". According to abusers, "chasing the dragon" refers to chasing the first high and not knowing what it will be if achieved.



Seized in Tishomingo County, MS in 2022.

If pharmaceutical opioids and counterfeit pills containing fentanyl and powder fentanyl wasn't enough, a review of data for 2022 revealed that Mississippians continue to have access to brown heroin, white heroin, and black tar heroin across the state. According to data gathered from the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory (MFL), analysis* during the 2022 calendar year revealed that substances containing heroin or heroin mixed with another substance(s) have been submitted to the state laboratory from 27 of 82 counties.

Historically, the price of heroin has decreased, and the purity has increased. Based on drug analysis, heroin is being combined with other substances, to include cocaine, fentanyl, 4-anilino-N-phenethyl-piperidine (4-ANPP), methamphetamine, morphine, tramadol, and other opioids to potentially increase profits.

ABUSE

Based on information reviewed from the DEA and the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory, the use of heroin appears to be decreasing, due in part to the increase in fentanyl availability. In 2022, Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Agents initiated 35 investigations involving heroin, compared to 71 cases in 2021, 61 in 2020, 122 cases in 2019, and 69 cases in 2018. For another frame of reference, the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory analyzed and identified heroin in 206 cases during 2022 (see the maps on Page 63). Treatment data also helps establish guideposts pertaining to the prevalence of a substance, or substances, being abused. According to the Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH), DMH reported 166 people sought treatment for heroin as their primary substance from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022. About 69%, or 116

individuals between 26-45 years old, were admitted for heroin abuse. About 30% of the remaining population (18 and under, 19-25 age group, 46-65, and 66 and older) reported other heroin as their primary drug. The secondary treatment data revealed that 39 patients were admitted for treatment and reported heroin as their secondary drug problem. Of these patients, 29 of them were between 26-45 years old. Three (3) individuals were between the ages of 19-25 and six (6) individuals were between 46-65 years old. Nine individuals reported heroin as their tertiary substance, or third in order. Based on the review of this data, 155 individuals reported having significant issues with heroin with individuals between 26 and 45 years old being the most prevalent. Heroin is also a factor in overdose deaths, whereas roughly 10% of the reported fatal drug overdose deaths involved heroin in 2022.

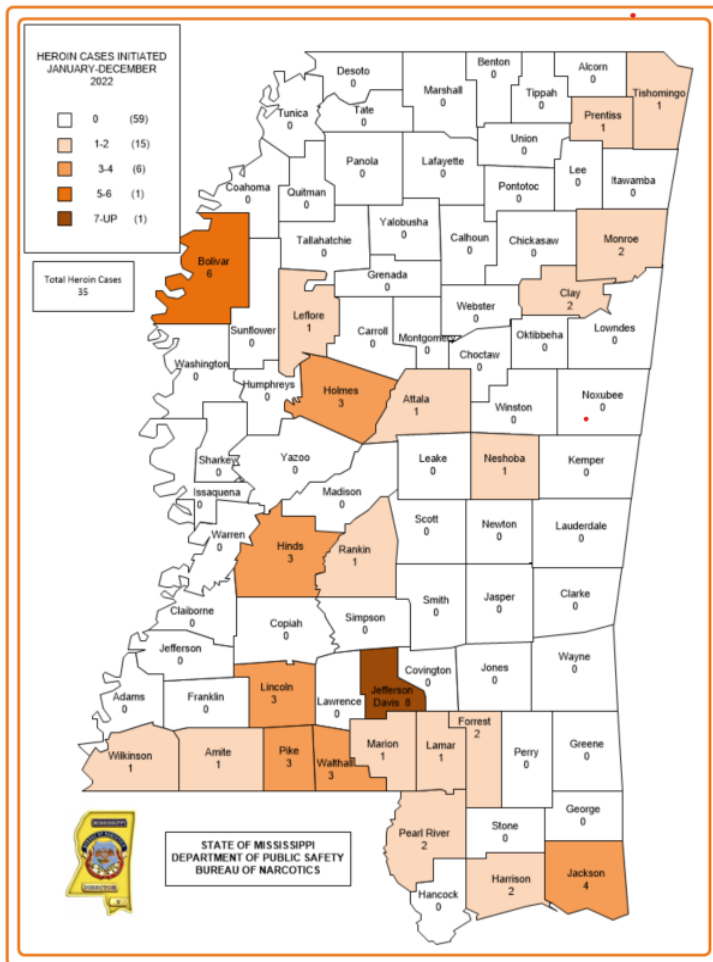
Even though the number of cases initiated by MBN have fluctuated and essentially decreased between 2019 through 2022, it is important to note that of these cases initiated, those individuals found to be in possession routinely had other controlled substances present, to include marijuana. Fifteen (15) arrests were made by MBN for heroin related charges including sale and possession during 2022. The Mississippi Forensics Laboratory analyzed 206 cases during calendar year 2022, which may have been submitted for drug analysis prior to 2022. As depicted by the maps on Page 63, heroin has been available in at least 33 Mississippi counties, which is a little more than one-third of the state's counties.



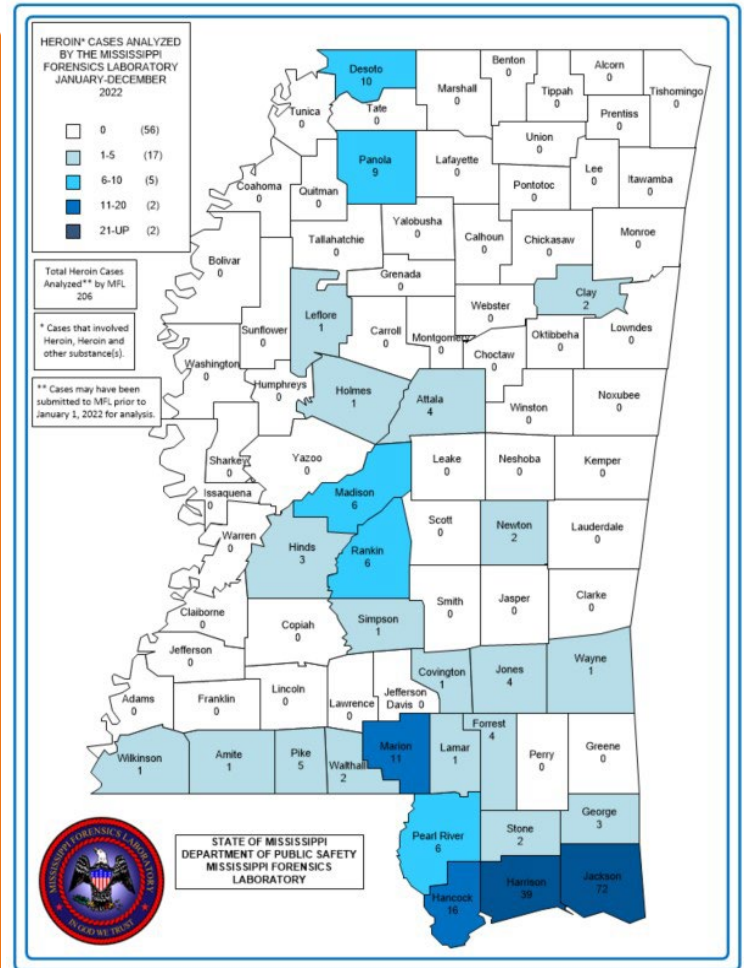
Seized in Prentiss County, MS in 2022.

AVAILABILITY

Several years back, heroin was gaining in popular and appeared to be re-emerging as a viable threat in Mississippi. White, brown, and black tar heroin is available in Mississippi. is readily available in most, if not all, communities in the United States. The Mexican drug cartels, primarily the Sinaloa Drug Cartel and Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), dominate the wholesale distribution of heroin, and other drugs, in the United States. National, regional, and/or local drug trafficking organizations are intricately involved in the distribution of illicit heroin. In 2022, MBN initiated 35 heroin cases and seized 12,881 grams of heroin, whereas approximately 12,076 grams was brown, approximately 173 grams was white, and approximately 617 grams was black tar. MBN seized over 267 grams and approximately 20 milliliters of heroin in 2021 that were attributed to 71 cases. In 2020, MBN initiated 61 cases that resulted in the seizure of approximately 415 grams and approximately 270 milliliters of heroin. MBN worked 122 cases involving heroin and seizing approximately 2,954 grams. During the past several years, brown heroin was the predominant form of heroin seen in Mississippi, whereas the trend continued in 2022.



MBN Heroin Cases Initiated During 2022



MFL Heroin Exhibits Analyzed During 2022

To obtain a border perspective, the United States Custom and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations seized almost 1,900 pounds of heroin during fiscal year (FY) 2022 (October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021). In comparison, CBP seized approximately 5,400 pounds of heroin in FY 2021 and approximately 5,763 pounds in FY 2020. The majority of the 2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Threat Assessment Survey Mississippi respondents indicated that the drug trafficking availability, demand, distribution, and transportation of heroin remained constant. Similarly, most of the Mississippi survey participants responded that the availability was considered moderate to high while the amount encountered during the survey period has remained about the same.



Seized in Jefferson Davis County, MS in 2022.

ASSOCIATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Crime and violence are attributed to drug use and drug distribution. Heroin related violence is minimal in Mississippi. However, gangs that are associated with selling small quantities of heroin, commit violent crimes, including assault, burglary, homicide, and robbery, to further their drug activity and protect their turf. Most of the violent crime in Mississippi is not directly attributed to heroin use and distribution. While looking specifically at heroin, this product is available through drug distributors in Mississippi and beyond. Combine high profits with high risks equals firearms being present when heroin is present. Additionally, it is not uncommon to locate multiple firearms, to include modified pistols and rifles, during these investigations associated with abusers to manufacturers to street-level dealers to traffickers. It is also widely known that drug distributors and local drug dealers continue to thrive on identifying themselves as “one stop” shops, thereby being poly-drug distributors. It is of great importance to repeat that local drug dealers and/or regional drug traffickers are dangerous because of the suspects’ possible affiliation with drug cartels and gangs. Violence is prevalent when drug abusers are robbed while trying to purchase, or score, their drug of choice from drug dealers. Abusers are more closely associated with property crime, where abusers steal to gather items of value or to be converted to cash to purchase these drugs.

PRODUCTION

Heroin is an opioid derived from morphine which comes from the poppy plant. Heroin generally comes in three different forms in the United States: powder, black tar and pills. Powder heroin comes in brown and white. White powder heroin is usually the most desirable and originates in Southeast and Southwest Asia. Brown powder originates from Mexico and is darker in color and is usually less powerful. Black tar heroin, which has a black sticky appearance, almost exclusively comes from Mexico and South America. The third, least common form of heroin is pill form. These are often sold in gel capsules or made with pill presses and mixed with other powders like powdered lactose, quinine and baby laxative. Usually, these pills mimic an opiate pill. Pills are usually the cheapest and lowest-quality form of the drug.

TRANSPORTATION AND DISTRIBUTION



Seized in Prentiss County, MS in 2022.

Mexican DTOs dominate the trafficking of Mexican black tar heroin and Mexican brown powder heroin. Most of the heroin distributed in the United States comes across the southwest border and is controlled by Mexican Cartels. White powder heroin originates in Southeast and southwest Asia. Heroin is typically transported by private and commercial vehicles from Mexico, and then across the United States from California, and other southwestern states. China and Mexico are the largest producers of fentanyl that makes its way into the United States via shipping containers, mail, or smuggled across the U.S./Mexico border. Heroin is usually transported into and through Mississippi to distribution points via three major routes: Interstate 10, Interstate 20, and Interstate 55.

NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

ASSESSMENT OF THE THREAT

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS), research chemicals (RC), designer drugs or “herbal highs,” are terms that have all been used to describe drugs that have been created to mimic the effects of scheduled or controlled illicit drugs. Synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones are most commonly abused amongst all NPS. Despite the fact that these substances are referred to as “new,” it is not that they are newly created substances, but rather newly abused and encountered on the illicit market. Moreover, many NPS’ existences have been previously documented in scientific and regulatory communities. In addition to the wide availability of these substances online, they are also readily available in gas stations, adult stores, and smoke shops. NPS include, but are not limited to, synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones, MDMA (Ecstasy), Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), phencyclidine (PCP), psilocybin (mushrooms), as well as emerging substances such as designer benzodiazepines.

ABUSE

NPS are a variety of other dangerous drugs that are equally addictive and just as devastating to society despite the fact that opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana receive a great deal of attention through enforcement efforts and media outlets. Although they remain popular among all age groups, NPS are typically marketed toward young adults as well as the homeless population. While some are used regularly among a small group of users, new substances often appear quickly and disappear again. NPS may be particularly attractive to drug users that are subjected to drug screening, such as inmates, parolees, and probationers, as drug screens often do not have the ability to identify all NPS. One of the most troubling aspects of NPS is the lack of awareness of the content and potency of the substance being consumed.

SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS (SPICE)

Synthetic cannabinoids are a class of chemicals that bind to cannabinoid receptors in the body, but they are different from the natural cannabinoids in the cannabis plants. Synthetic cannabinoids can be used/consumed in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, 1) being sprayed or otherwise soaked into a plant or other base material then typically smoked, 2) suspended in an oil form to be used in e-cigarettes or, 3) pressed into counterfeit prescription pills. The blend of material, oil, or pill is sometimes misleadingly referred to as synthetic marijuana. During 2022, MBN initiated 17 cases involving synthetic cannabinoids and resulting in three arrests, a decrease from 2021. MBN initiated 44 cases involving synthetic cannabinoids during 2021. These cases resulted in four arrests and the



Seized in Pike County, MS in 2022.

seizure of 407 containers, 1644 grams, 1418 milliliters and 320 dosage units of the substance. There were 50 cases initiated in 2020, whereas six arrests were made and approximately 295 containers, 539 grams, 21-liter units of the substance were seized.

MDMA (ECSTASY)



Seized in Warren County, MS in 2022.

3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, commonly referred to as MDMA or Ecstasy, is a psychoactive drug used recreationally. It is chemically similar to both stimulants and hallucinogens, producing feelings of increased energy, pleasure, emotional warmth, and distorted sensory and time perception. While it was initially popular in the nightclub scene and at “raves,” the drug now affects a broader range of people and is often referred to as Molly and Ecstasy. In 2022, 74 cases seizing approximately 15,277 dosage units and approximately 3,057 grams of MDMA while culminating with 43 arrests. This is similar to 2021 statistics, in which MBN initiated 65 cases in resulting in 51 arrests and the seizure of approximately 23,499 dosage units and 3,386 grams of MDMA. In 2020 case activity resulted in 67 investigations with 72 arrests and the seizure of approximately 4,941 dosage units and 241 grams. MBN initiated 86 investigations in 2019 that resulted

in 96 arrests being made and seized nearly 5,000 dosage units and 280 grams.

OTHER HALLUCINOGENS

MBN initiated nine cases involving other hallucinogens in 2022 with the majority being for psilocybin mushrooms. This is a slight increase from seven cases in 2021 involving psilocybin mushrooms and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). In 2020 MBN initiated 13 cases involving other hallucinogens in 2020 involving LSD, psilocybin mushrooms and dimethyltryptamine (DMT). MBN initiated five investigations involving these types of substances in 2019.

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), also known as acid, is a psychedelic drug known for its psychological effects, which may include altered awareness of one's surroundings, perceptions, and feelings as well as sensations and images that seem real though they are not. Used mainly as a recreational drug, LSD is sold on the street in small tablets (“microdots”), capsules or gelatin squares (“windowpanes”). It is sometimes added to absorbent paper, which is then divided into small squares decorated with designs or cartoon characters (“loony toons”). LSD is typically either swallowed or held under the tongue but can also be injected.

Psilocybin mushrooms are one of a polyphyletic group of mushrooms that contain any of various psychedelic



Psilocybin Mushrooms Seized in Prentiss County, MS in 2022.

compounds including psilocybin, and psilocin.

When consumed or brewed into a tea, mushrooms can produce a state of euphoria, altered thinking processes, closed and open-eye visuals, synesthesia, an altered sense of time, and spiritual experiences.

AVAILABILITY

While the most common way to obtain NPS is through the internet, they are also readily available at college campuses, night clubs, and rave parties, especially MDMA and LSD. People continue to seek NPS out in gas stations/convenience stores, adult stores, and smoke and drug paraphernalia shops. The danger in this lies in the fact that these substances are not regulated and because of the variations in contents, two seemingly identical products sold in stores may have two completely different cannabinoids, cathinones, etc. inside them or may be laced/contaminated with other substances like fentanyl.

ASSOCIATED CRIME AND VIOLENCE

The use of synthetic cathinones and synthetic cannabinoids has been linked to violence and overdose deaths across the country. Violence has also been linked to the use of other synthetic drugs such as bath salts, PCP, and steroids. GHB can cause memory lapse, confusion, or amnesia in victims which can lead to difficulty in prosecutions. As law enforcement and policy makers have begun to target stores selling synthetic cannabinoids, sales have moved more towards the streets.

PRODUCTION

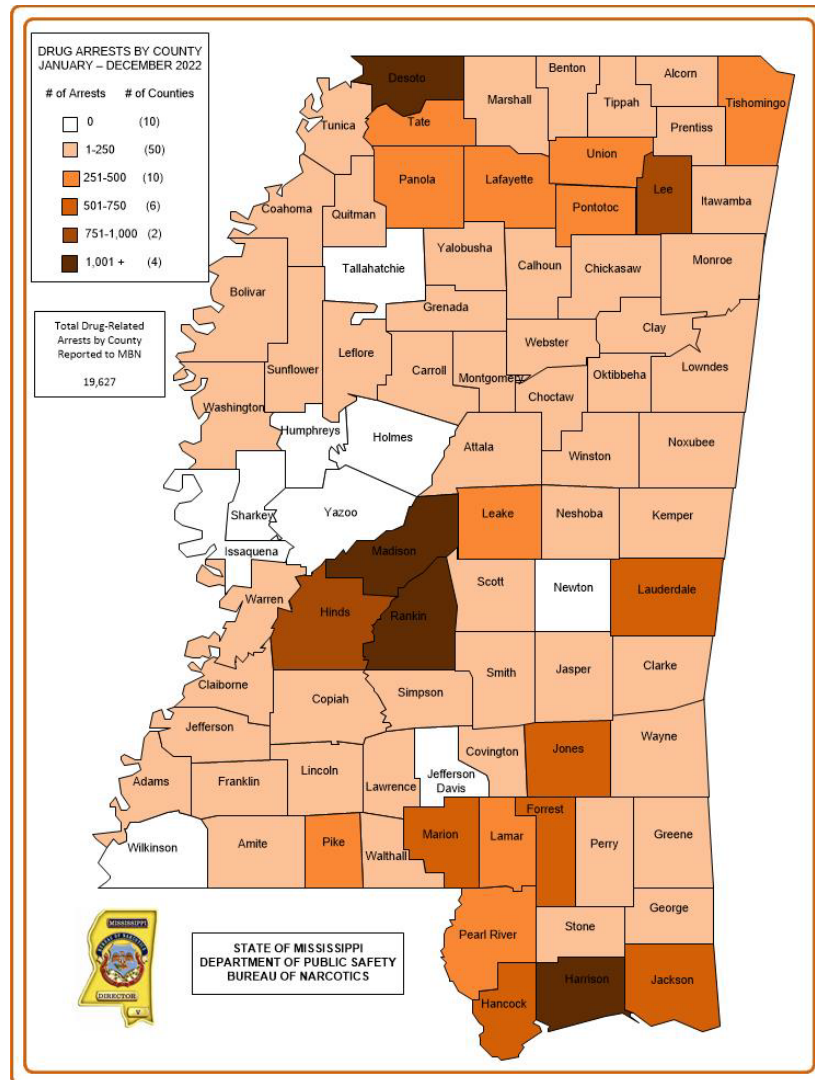
NPS are all created substances, from chemicals requiring no plant material, and are made to mimic the effects of other illicit drugs. Due to a lack in standardization, people often do not really know what they're getting. For example, synthetic cannabinoids, which are often obtained from China, are sold in colorful packaging, designed to support the belief of synthetic cannabinoids being "safe" for use. While MDMA was initially developed by a German pharmaceutical company in 1912, presently its main source of production is more ambiguous. Manufacturing LSD requires laboratory equipment and experience in the field of organic chemistry. Already synthesized NPS are commonly available in China and other Asian and European countries and often shipped through mail carriers to be processed and packaged domestically.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation of these various hallucinogens and synthetics is usually via privately owned vehicles and through the internet via parcel delivery services like the United States Postal Service (USPS), Federal Express (FedEx), and United Parcel Service (UPS).

DISTRIBUTION

Besides the wide availability via the internet, more and more NPS are being sold in gas stations and smoke shops. There has been an influx of synthetic cannabinoids being marketed as legal e-liquids or vape oils. As law enforcement targets these types of shops, the sales of these e-liquids are making their way towards street sales. MDMA and LSD distribution typically occur at private parties and close to high school and college campuses. Some street gang members in Mississippi also distributes these illicit substances.



Mississippi Drug Arrests as reported to MBN for 2022.

V. DRUG OVERDOSES

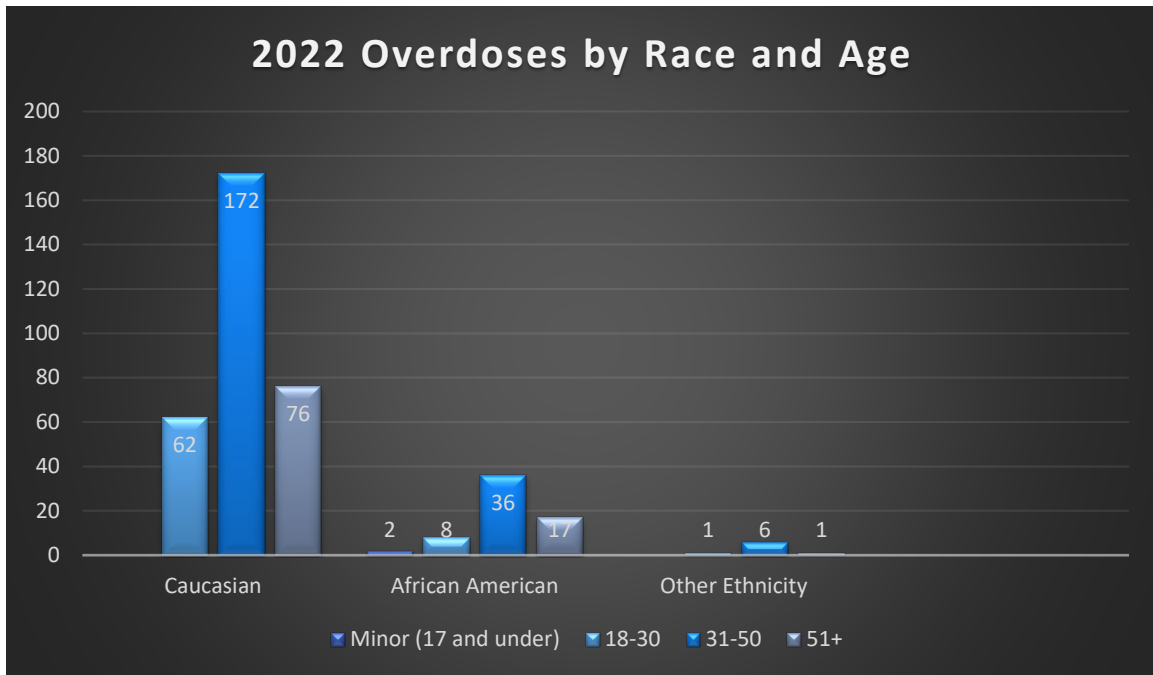
As of March 31, 2023, Mississippi Coroners reported 379 Drug Related Overdose deaths to MBN that occurred in 52 counties. Compliance with reporting overdose deaths continues to be haphazard in some areas. The Mississippi Code of 1972 Annotated, Section 41-29-159 (2012), requires that healthcare providers, coroners, and law enforcement officers notify the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics of all drug overdose deaths or suspected drug overdose deaths within 24 hours. Similarly, Section 41-61-59 (2012) mandates that MBN is informed of deaths that are caused by drug overdose or believed to be caused by drug overdose.

2021 - 426 cases reported involving 429 individuals experienced fatal overdoses.

2020 - 531 cases reported involving 533 individuals experienced fatal overdoses.

2019 - 389 cases reported involving 392 individuals experienced fatal overdoses.

(Intelligence Division note: Although many coroners are reporting these deaths since the passage of this bill, there is no penalty for failure to report an overdose. Therefore, these figures may not be an accurate reflection of the actual number of overdose deaths in the State of Mississippi.)



In Mississippi, the greatest number of overdose deaths involve individuals between the ages of 31-50, recorded as 143 males and 72 females. The next highest group are those who were 50 and older, documented as 60 males and 34 females. And the third group makes up the 18-30 year olds, consisting of 51 males and 22 females. The fatal overdoses included 312 Caucasians (201 males and 111 females), 63 African Americans (46 males and 17 females), and eight other ethnicities.

MBN speculates that the distribution of NARCAN® (naloxone HCl) to first responders resulted in a reduction of deaths secondary to drug (opiates) overdoses in our state. NARCAN® (naloxone HCl) Nasal Spray is used for the treatment of an opioid emergency or a possible opioid overdose with signs of breathing problems and severe sleepiness or not being able to respond. These statistics by no means represent the alarming numbers of non-fatal overdose cases not reported to MBN that, by speculation, could be in the thousands.

The misuse of and addiction to opioids—including prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl is a serious national crisis that affects public health as well as social and economic welfare. Pew, www.pewtrusts.org, estimated in August 2021 that the total "economic burden" of opioid overdose, misuse, and dependence in the United States costs \$141.8 billion a year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, there have been three waves of the Opioid Overdose Epidemic. They define Wave One as the rise in prescription opioid overdose deaths in 1999. Wave Two began in 2010 with the rise of heroin overdose deaths. And Wave Three began in 2013 with the rise in synthetic overdose deaths. Some consider the United States to still be in Wave Three and believe that Wave Four is around the corner. Fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, and non-opioid synthetic substances continue to pour into the United States. In addition, other classes of synthetic substances are becoming apparent through analysis at the local, state, and federal levels. Some of these substances include synthetic benzodiazepines. Additionally, counterfeit substances continue to plague our communities, whereas medications that are not approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration for medical use in this country are being consumed by Americans on American soil.

VI. ILLICIT FINANCE

The United States Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) continues to seek ways in denying criminal and malign actors access to the U.S. and international financial system by detecting, disrupting, and preventing illicit financial activities within the U.S. Illicit activity occurs both domestically and internationally. Some of the key illicit finance threats are money laundering from various crimes (including fraud), drug trafficking, terrorist financing, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) financing, organized crime, human trafficking, and corruption. Vulnerabilities that have been exploited are, but not limited to, lack of beneficial ownership information, real estate, correspondent banking, uneven anti-money laundering obligations, compliance weakness, cash, complicity professionals and digital assets. All of these have in some form contributed to the allowance of illicit proceeds to enter the United States financial system.

FINANCE/MONEY LAUNDERING

Why is laundering money illegal? Simply because it is a way for criminals, terrorists, and other illegal organizations to profit from illegal activity. Money can be laundered through placement,

layering, and integration. Placement is where the funds are placed legally back into the financial system to avoid banks, financial institutions, and law enforcement agencies of being suspicious. Layering is after the funds have been placed backed into the financial system, it is then entered through a series of transactions designed to confuse the paper trail for investigators. Integration is the last and final step before the funds are withdrawn and put back into circulation. This is when the funds are reimbursed to the criminal from what seem to be legitimate sources.

Money laundering of cash is declining due to the rise of emerging technology, customers providing payment through virtual currencies, and phishing scams. Criminals are exploiting new technology as they become more mainstream, particularly digital assets. Laundering illegal proceeds through digital assets is frequently linked to cybercrime and buyers of narcotics, like fentanyl, both on the Clearweb and Darknet marketplace.

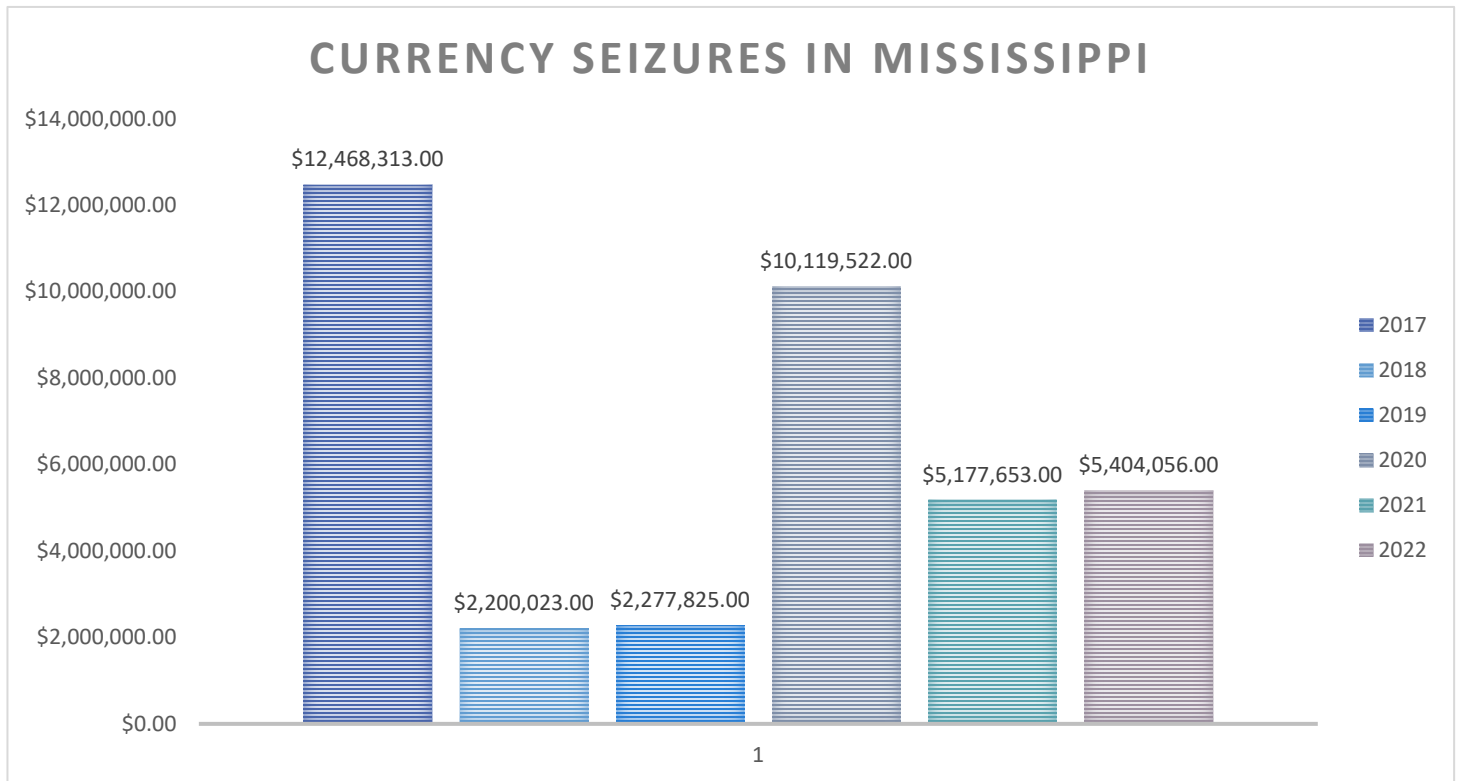
Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) continue to employ a variety of money laundering methods. DTOs are pursuing a more creative and sophisticated method to conceal drug proceeds to elude law enforcement by turning to Professional Money Laundering Networks (PMLN) who receive a fee or commission for their laundering services and often use their specialized expertise to launder proceeds generated by others, regardless of the criminal actions. PMLNs are constantly evolving and adapting to law enforcement.

According to Performance Management Process, the Gulf Coast HIDTA Program consists of seven initiatives that essentially encompasses most of the entire State of Mississippi. Collectively, these Gulf Coast HIDTA Initiatives have identified and conducted thorough investigations to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations and money laundering organizations engaged in local, multi-state, and international criminal activity. A snapshot of these enforcement efforts has identified that most of the local organizations are comprised of African Americans, but also includes Caucasians and Mexicans. To provide an idea of the source organization characteristics have a small majority comprised of Hispanics, followed by African Americans, but also includes Mexicans and Caucasians. Based on the review of this data, Mississippi has significant drug trafficking and money laundering organizations enthrallled from side to side and top to bottom of the state. This PMP report confirms that methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, and MDMA are the primary drugs of concern. It is also indicative that Metro Jackson and the Mississippi Gulf Coast areas have significant drug activity, which coincides with some of the largest populations in the state.

In 2022, MBN conducted investigations that resulted in the seizure of illicit funds during criminal interdiction stops and other investigations from subjects of drug distribution investigations to the sum of \$942,850.35 in MBN initiated investigations. MBN Agents assisted other agencies with the seizure of approximately \$429,948.00. According to BLOC/ Gulf Coast HIDTA data, participating agencies seized approximately \$5,404,056.00 from drug violators in Mississippi for a combined total of \$6,776,854.35. The seizure of these funds has greatly impacted the drug trade within the state.

Law enforcement utilizes the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FINCEN) to assist in identifying assets of drug dealers. The Suspicious Activity Report (SAR), Currency Transaction

Report (CTR) and Currency Transaction Report for Casinos (CTR-C) are the most common utilized by law enforcement. Although FINCEN helps address the difficulties of tracking wired monies and/or monies moved via financial institution, the bulk movement of currency out of the



United States and into the transit and source countries remains a problem for law enforcement.

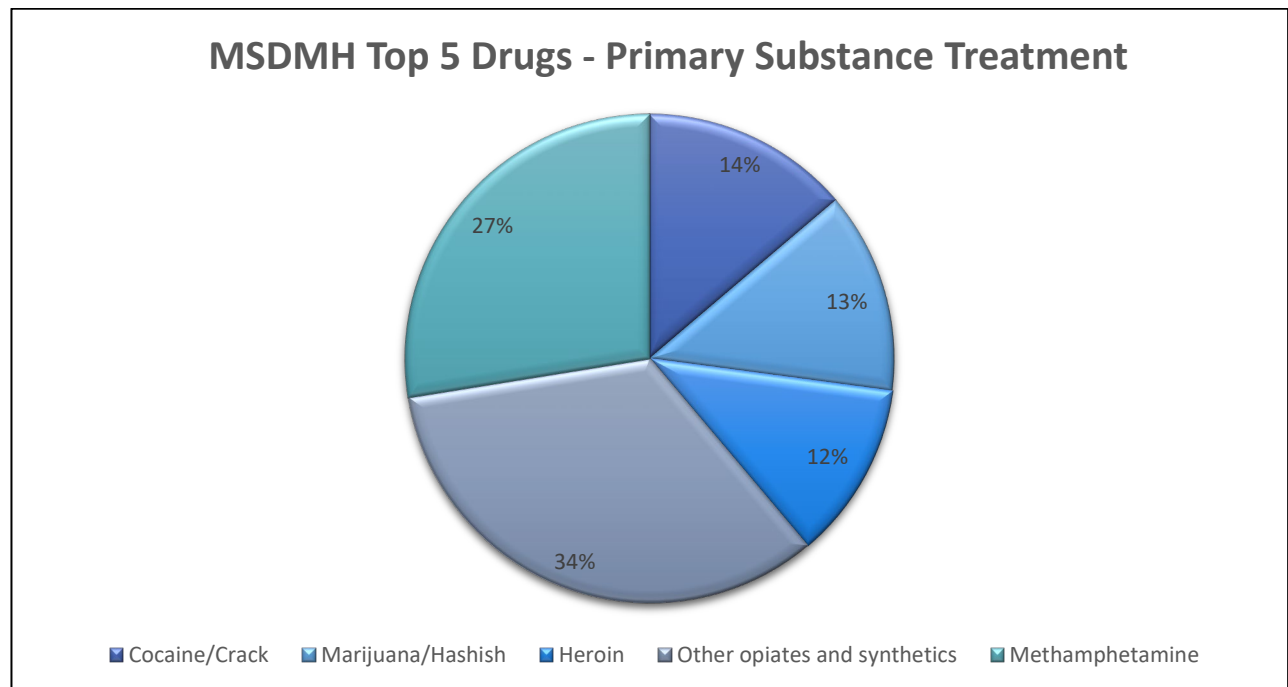
VII. TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics has worked over the years to establish and expand purposeful partnerships with other disciplines, to include the Mississippi Public Health Institute, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, the Mississippi Department of Health, and other entities, both public and private. Through these partnerships, a collaborative approach is being taken to enhance public health and public safety. These agencies and entities focus on treatment programs and initiatives that enhance the lives of those who need treatment for substance abuse or other medical issues.

TREATMENT

The Mississippi Public Health Institute, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, the Mississippi Department of Health, and other entities are working to streamline the process for individuals with substance abuse, mental health, or other medical issues to obtain treatment. The

Mississippi Department of Mental Health, the Mississippi Public Health Institute, and other groups are working to facilitate those in need to get help as swiftly as possible. The Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH) funds Mobile Crisis Response Teams across the state that are provided by the twelve Community Mental Health Centers. According to the Mississippi Department of Mental Health's website, dmh.ms.gov, Crisis Response Teams can help people who are experiencing a situation where the person's behavior health needs to exceed the person's resources to effectively handle the circumstances. These teams are comprised of mental health professionals who can provide support to people experiencing a mental health, alcohol and drug, or intellectual and developmental disabilities crisis. In addition, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health also oversees the Mississippi State Hospital, the East Mississippi State Hospital, North Mississippi State Hospital, and South Mississippi State Hospital, which are public funded behavioral health centers. DMH's Substance Use Services operates facilities that utilize person-centered recovery program that incorporates the integration of Dialectal Behavior Therapy and the 12 Step Recovery Model. The goal is to actively engage patients in creating an individualized relapse prevention plan based on insights, coping skills, and social support gained through treatment. MSH provides a primary substance use program for adolescents who are engaging in harmful drug or alcohol use behaviors. The program employs evidence-based individual and group behavioral health interventions grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Motivational Enhancement, as well as the 12 Step Recovery Model. In addition to targeting substance use behaviors, the program helps adolescents with presenting co-occurring diagnoses, family/relational problems, and impactful traumatic experiences. The Child and Adolescent Service operate 22 beds for psychiatric treatment for children and adolescents, and substance use treatment for adolescents. There is no set number of beds reserved for substance use treatment in the unit. The beds are filled according to need. In addition, there a numerous treatment facilities and businesses around the state to help people who need and want help.



In addition to public and private in-patient and out-patient treatment programs, Mississippi also has drug courts to intervene and reduce the number of individuals with substance abuse issues from being sentenced to prison. Currently, Mississippi has 44 intervention courts. These include 22 adult felony drug intervention courts, 4 adult misdemeanor drug intervention courts, 15 juvenile drug intervention courts and 3 family drug intervention courts.

The 2023 Mississippi Legislature is considering bills, to include House Bill 1218, that will amend appropriate sections of the Mississippi Code of 1972 to place Mississippi in a better position to assist individuals suffering from mental health issues and provide for alternate sentencing in mental health treatment courts. It appears that this court system will help provide behavioral health treatment for those individuals with mental health and substance abuse issues who come into contact with the criminal justice system. This will increase the availability for treatment for individuals who are in dire need, which in turn should positively impact public health and public safety of Mississippians.

PREVENTION

In Mississippi, prevention of drug abuse continues to be a concern to a host of entities and agencies. It is apparent through collaborative working groups, such as the Mississippi Opioid and Heroin Data Collaborative, which is a cooperative effort between the Mississippi State Department of Health, Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Mississippi Public Health Initiative, Mississippi Board of Pharmacy, and Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics. This group looks at a wide range of datapoints to provide an insight to Mississippi's opioid and heroin abuse problem. These reports summarize data on opioid prescriptions dispensed in Mississippi, fatal drug overdoses reported to the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, naloxone administrations by Emergency Medical Services for suspected overdoses, drug-related arrests, and treatment services for opioid-related disorders within facilities certified by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health. The goal of these reports is to provide timely and accurate information to the public and policy makers on key indicators measuring the scope of the opioid epidemic in Mississippi. The findings aim to inform and support data-driven decision-making. These reports show the commitment and partnership to make a better place to live for all Mississippians. In addition to the Mississippi Opioid and Heroin Data Collaborative, more efforts are being made to prevent drug misuse and abuse.

In conjunction with treatment initiatives and collaborative working groups, MBN seeks to create and expand programs that are focused on prevention. Some of the initiatives include the Drug Demand Reduction Program, which aims to promote public awareness and education across the state. This program also engages in working group meetings on a bi-weekly basis to discuss current issues, advances, and ideas to improve and expand prevention and treatment opportunities.

Another useful tool that can be utilized in the prevention of drug abuse is the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), or simply referred to as the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) continue to be among the most promising state-level

interventions to improve opioid prescribing, inform clinical practice, and protect patients at risk. Essentially, the PDMP is an electronic database that tracks controlled substance prescriptions in a state. PDMPs can provide health authorities timely information about prescribing and patient behaviors that contribute to the epidemic and facilitate a rapid, targeted response. According to the Federation of State Medical Boards, 49 states, along with the District of Columbia and Guam, have operational prescription drug monitoring programs. Missouri, the holdout state, has a prescription drug monitoring program that isn't yet operational. The Prescription Monitoring Program, a nationwide initiative, is a state-level monitoring program that allows this vital information to be available to those who need it most, primarily the CDC and medical providers. The access varies from program to program but ideally medical providers have access to records pertaining to individual patients with the primary purpose as public health and safety. Further access is determined by the individual state's program. Let's look at Mississippi, whereas as the program is referred to as the Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MS PMP) or simply Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP).

The Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MS PMP) is an electronic tracking program managed by the Mississippi Board of Pharmacy to aid practitioners and dispensers in providing proper pharmaceutical care relating to controlled substances. According to the Mississippi Board of Pharmacy's website, it also serves as a tool for regulatory agencies and authorized law enforcement to identify potential inappropriate use of controlled substance prescription medication. The MS PMP is an online service available 24/7 that provides patient's profile of controlled substance medications with prescriber and dispenser information. PMP Aware has been a very useful tool for the state of Mississippi. Every controlled substance prescribed statewide, is reported to the PMP Aware clearinghouse every 24 hours allowing for earlier identification and intervention.

As mentioned, the MS PMP maintains a wealth of data as it relates to medications that are prescribed and dispensed. This valuable program provides a litmus test of current drugs that are being prescribed, and more than likely, abused and diverted. Unfortunately, Mississippians continue to lose their lives due to prescription drug use, misuse, and abuse. A simple PMP report can tell a doctor if a patient is doctor shopping, how many prescriptions that individual had filled within a year, doctor's name and what prescription drug was prescribed. The Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) continues to evolve each year as registered users continue to increase. More users correlate to additional requests which increases the opportunity to identify problematic patterns and/or suspicious activity. These problematic patterns and/or suspicious activity could be indicative of criminal activity, abuse and treatment needs, or both.

The Prescription Drop Box continues to expand through various organizations, such as the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators and Standup Mississippi. Thanks in part to grant funding by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health and the Mississippi Partnership Project, Mississippians have access to approximately 100 prescription drop boxes, when taking all drop boxes into account, located at law enforcement agencies and pharmacies. There are 26 different law enforcement agencies (listed on Page 76) with 39 locations throughout the state to help citizens dispose of their expired or unwanted prescriptions.

Prescription Drug Drop Boxes Located at Law Enforcement Facilities in Mississippi.

Bay St. Louis PD	Jackson PD - Precinct 3	MHP - Greenwood	Ocean Spring PD
Biloxi PD	Jackson PD – Precinct 4	MHP - Hattiesburg	Oxford PD
Brandon PD	Kemper County SO	MHP – Headquarters	Pascagoula PD
Byram PD	Long Beach PD	MHP – Meridian	Pass Christian PD
Columbus PD	Louisville PD	MHP – New Albany	Pearl PD
D'Iberville PD	McComb PD	MHP – Pearl	Ridgeland PD
Gulfport PD	Meridian PD	MHP- Starkville	Smith County SO
Jackson PD - Headquarters	MHP – Batesville	MS State Univ PD	Vicksburg PD
Jackson PD - Precinct 1	MHP - Biloxi	Moss Point PD	Waveland PD
Jackson PD - Precinct 2	MHP – Brookhaven	Natchez PD	

As it has been stated before, societal problems can not be addressed merely by enforcement efforts by local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement is only one approach to societal issues. A collaborative approach through joining law enforcement, public health, mental health, treatment, and other professions together to share data across this variety of disciplines is being practiced in Mississippi by public and private entities. These collaborative efforts allow for timely and relevant information to be shared across multiple disciplines and found by the public in multiple formats, to include being found through queries of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Mississippi State Department of Health, and partnerships.

VIII. STREET AND OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

STREET GANGS

Mississippi's legal definition of a "street gang," "gang," "organized gang," or "criminal street gang" is defined as any combination, confederation, alliance, network, conspiracy, understanding, or other similar conjoining, in law or in fact, of three or more persons with an established hierarchy that, through its membership or through the agency of any member, engages in felonious criminal activity, as defined by Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, Section 97-44-3. This sets the street gangs apart from any other type of group. Street gangs are turf oriented and will go to great lengths to protect their territory. Experts say teens joining young is all too common; gangs recruit children as young as eight years old. Social media and the use of apps continue to be primary means of communication, promotion, and conducting business. Gangs focus on integration and acceptance in the community. Based on conversations among

law enforcement officers, juvenile cliques, that identify themselves as a group or gang, are a serious problem in Mississippi and a variety of crimes can be attributed to these groups. It is important to recognize that neighborhood-based gangs pose the highest rate of significant threat for violent crimes in the United States, versus national-level street gangs, prison gangs, and outlaw motorcycle gangs, according to www.dosomething.org.



The formation of neighborhood hybrid gangs and cliques contributes to the significant variation of gang subsets within the state. Hybrid gangs are new youth gangs engaged in illegal activities. Unlike traditional gangs based on race or neighborhood loyalty, the new gangsters are devoted to making money through illegal activities such as drugs, robbery, and prostitution. Such gangs are found throughout the United States.

Hybrid gangs consist of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and individuals participating in multiple units, or gangs. Such gangs have unclear codes of conduct and symbolic association with more than one gang. Hybrid gangs modify traditional gang culture with their personal interpretations and agendas. Hybrid gangs have become a big criminal and societal problem in local communities. These young adults are trying to find somewhere to fit in, find something to identify with.

Cliques are semi-autonomous and not necessarily tied to a formal structure, which allows them to a certain level of independence in controlling their criminal portfolios. Their illegal activities include micro-trafficking, car theft, prostitution, human smuggling, human trafficking, firearms trafficking, hitmen for hire, money laundering and extortion. Extortion and local drug trafficking are their most significant sources of income.

The cliques' degree of independence varies and depends on geography, the social fabric, and the political makeup of the places where each operates. It can be contingent on the personal histories of the heads of each clique and their relationship to other gang leaders. Vast differences in the size of cliques and their respective criminal sophistication are also due, in part, to their semi-independent status.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicates there are now over 1.4 million gang members involved in the 33,000 active gangs with approximately 1.4 million members operating in the 50 states including Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. According to FBI Statistics, Mississippi was one of eleven states that had increases in more than five percent in three categories of violent crime but were one of nineteen states that didn't have an increase over five percent in arrests in any category of violent crime between 2007-2017. Based on further data, Mississippi's violent crime rate is 2.9 times higher than state's violent crime arrest rate. According to <http://50statespublicsafety.org>, this information was published in 2021. The National Gang Center, found online at <https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov> has a lot of datasets and information on gangs and violent crime.

The number of gang members in the U.S. has been on an increase but has been steady in the

past several years. Some of the most dangerous gangs in the United States are Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), Latin Kings, Crips, 18th Street Gang, Bloods, Nuestra Familia, Mexican Mafia, and Aryan Brotherhood. Six of those ten have been identified in Mississippi: MS-13, Latin Kings, Crips, Bloods, Mexican Mafia and Aryan Brotherhood. The Simon City Royals, Gangster Disciples, Latin Kings, Vice Lords, and Subsets influence the southernmost counties of our state. It is noteworthy to mention that gangs are considered a threat to national security and have the attention of local, state, and federal law enforcement across the nation, including in Mississippi.



Various social media platforms, such as Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook, are utilized for advertising multiple illicit drugs. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter offer free live-streaming services that gangs operate. It has been reported that gang members use these streaming services to identify real-time locations of targeted individuals for assault or retaliation. Additionally, these groups use encrypted messaging apps, such as WhatsApp and Signal, to communicate.

Online payment systems, such as PayPal, Venmo, CashApp, and Green Dot, facilitate payment arrangements among individuals and groups for illicit drugs. Sellers and buyers often communicate in code using emojis, hashtags, and acronyms to make transactions.

The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics initiated 88 cases associated with gang affiliations in the year 2022, compared to 37 cases in 2021, 36 cases in 2020, and 27 cases in 2019. There was a slight increase in the number of arrests of members belonging to the Vice Lords and Gangster Disciples street gangs. Members of both gangs were charged with possession with intent to deliver drugs, including but not limited to, powder and crack cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana. Charges also stemmed from possession of powder and crack cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and MDMA.

	# of Gangs	Total Cases	Total Subjects	Total Arrests	Total Charges
2019 Totals	8	27	37	11	55
2020 Totals	5	36	49	16	88
2021 Totals	4	37	44	14	74
2022 Totals	8	88	130	69	167



Throughout Mississippi, gangs use graffiti markings to identify their turf. Ages of identified gang members range from 13 years of age to 50 plus. In 2022, MBN Agents initiated substantially more investigations involving gang members. From conversations with Mississippi law enforcement partners, gang activity continues to involve an increasing number of juveniles.

Joining the military has been found to be an increasing trend amongst gang members. They receive combat training, in addition to

other skills, then utilize this training in order to instruct/educate other gang members. They also have access to dangerous and deadly weapons as well as other tools of destruction. Gangster Disciples have been documented in the U.S. military, found in both U.S. and overseas bases. Known Gangster Disciples graffiti has been reportedly seen on US military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. Gang members have also begun to infiltrate police departments, using tactics and information they learn there to both outsmart and confront law enforcement and rival gangs.



Gang members are also using technology to monitor, target, and conduct counter-surveillance of law enforcement. Utilizing such tools as the internet, smartphones, drones, GPS devices, confidential informants, VoIP, PlayStation and Xbox, gang members can identify, locate, and disrupt law enforcement operations.



Gangster Disciples "represent" with the colors black and blue. Gang members are known to wear Georgetown Hoyas, Florida Gators, and Duke Blue Devils apparel. The predominant symbol used to represent them is the six-pointed Star of David (☆). The symbol pays homage to founder David Barksdale. The Gangster Disciples are

active in 110 cities and in 31 states, predominantly in the midwestern and southeastern United States. The gang consists of approximately 30,000 to 35,000 members. Their most notable criminal activities include drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, murder, and prostitution.

Symbols often used to characterize the Vice Lords are hats cocked to the left side, rabbits wearing a bow tie (The *Playboy* logo), martini glasses, gloves, top hats, canes, five-point stars (points representing Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice), crescent moons, pitchforks pointing down, broken hearts with wings, pyramids with eyes above them, and five-point crowns. They're comprised of approximately 30,000 to 45,000 members. As reported by the Harrison County, Mississippi Sheriff's Office, Vice Lords use local juveniles and the music industry to recruit new members. Their criminal activities include drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, fraud, money laundering, boosting and murder.



The Simon City Royals is one of the predominant gangs in Mississippi. They were formally the Almighty Simon City oyal Nation, a greaser gang affiliated with a Chicago street gang instituted in the late 1950's known as Simon City. Having 10,000 to 15,000 members, this organization is known by city, state, and federal officials, as well as the media, to have once been the largest Caucasian gang. The Simon City Royals are now an affiliate of the All Folk Nation. As of 2003, Royal recruits in Mississippi are required to be sponsored by a member, serve a six-month probationary period

(during which time they are referred to as "prospects"), and ultimately declare a lifetime commitment to the gang. The Simon City Royals have recently made a notable split creating a new set known as Sip City or Thirteen Dreams (a 501(c)(3) organization). Simon City Royals' symbols include a shield with an R for Royal, 6-pointed star, cross, 3-pointed crown and the royal knight. This organization is represented by the colors black, white and blue. Criminal activities include dealing of illegal drugs and other contraband, particularly in prison where members are incarcerated. They are also involved in racketeering and loan sharking.



Simon City Royals



Currently, law enforcement's most concerning street gang is Mara Salvatrucha, most commonly known as MS-13. With approximately 10,000 members in the United States, MS-13 is notorious for its propensity for vicious violence. Initiation requires committing murder and many gang members have been convicted of homicide, some using machetes to behead their victims. Most of the gang is ethnically composed of Central Americans (mostly Salvadorans) who are active in urban and suburban areas. Traditionally, MS-13 gang members wear Chicago Bulls hats in the gang's official colors blue & white, but members in Massachusetts have been known to wear Chicago Bulls hats in a variety of different colors in an attempt to avoid identification. MS-13 gang members commonly use Chicago Bulls apparel to identify themselves. Tattoos common to the MS-13 are "MS," "Salvatrucha," "devil horns," the name of their clique, and more. MS-13 utilize a system of hand signs for purposes of identification and communication. One of the most commonly displayed is the "devil's head" which forms a 'M' when displayed upside down. The hand sign is similar to the same symbol commonly seen displayed by heavy metal musicians and their fans. Founders of Mara Salvatrucha borrowed the hand sign after attending concerts of heavy metal bands. Criminal activities include drug trafficking, robbery, larceny, human trafficking, extortion, illegal immigration, murder, prostitution, racketeering, battery, kidnapping and arms trafficking.

Tattoos common to the Mexican Mafia are symbols which include images of a black hand. The gang's primary symbol, which is often used in tattoos by members, is the national symbol of Mexico (eagle and a snake) atop a flaming circle over crossed knives. The number 13 is used to show allegiance to the Mexican Mafia. M is the 13th letter of the alphabet. The Mexican Mafia did not originate in Mexico and is entirely a U.S. criminal prison organization. Even though homosexuals are barred from entry into the gang, they are engaged heavily in homosexual prostitution in the prison system. Criminal activities both inside and outside the prison



system involve extorting drug distributors outside prison and distributing various narcotics within and outside the penitentiary. Criminal activities include: murder, money laundering, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, kidnapping, pandering, racketeering, extortion, human trafficking, illegal immigration, fraud and illegal gambling.



A Sureno is a Latino gang member who belongs to a street gang that identifies with, and is subservient to, the Mexican Mafia. Surenos use the number 13 which represents the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, the letter M, in order to pay allegiance to the Mexican Mafia. They are soldiers for the Mexican Mafia, and further their organized criminal enterprises. Symbols common to the Surenos are Sur, XIII, X3, 13, SUR 13, Uno Tres, Trece and 3-dots. Surenos display tattoos with the number 13, Sureno, Sur, South Sider, or Kanpol. Surenos represent themselves by wearing the colors blue and gray. Criminal activities include human smuggling, murder, drug trafficking, extortion, assault, theft, robbery, fraud, and arms trafficking.

Symbols common to the Black P. (Prince) Nation, or the Black P. Stones, are a pyramid with 21 bricks, rising sun, eye, number 7, five-point star, and the crescent moon. Their colors are red, black and green. They have approximately 30,000 to 42,000 members nationwide. The Black P. Stones are also allied with the Almighty Latin Kings Nation, the most organized Hispanic street gang in the U.S., known for murder, drug trafficking, and robberies. The BPSN finances itself through an array of criminal activities including drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, murder and domestic terrorism.



The Crips are one of the largest and most violent associations of street gangs in the United States with an estimated 30,000 to 35,000 members. The Crips are a primarily African American gang. Crips will misspell words in an attempt to avoid using certain letter combinations that are viewed as disrespectful to the vandalizing gang. For instance, the letters "C" and "K" together stand for "Crip Killer," therefore, the Crips will avoid using this letter combination and instead spell words that would normally end in "-ck" with two "C's" so that the word "luck" is spelled "lucc." Crips represent themselves by wearing the color blue; some sets may dress in purple. Crips refer to each other as Cuzz or Loc which itself is sometimes used as a moniker for Crip. "Crab" is the most disrespectful epithet to call a Crip and can warrant fatal retaliation. Numbers and symbols depend on set affiliation. Crips use the letter "c" in place of "b" as a way of disrespecting the rival gang, Bloods. Crips call themselves "Blood Killas" (BK) and wear

British Knight (BK) tennis shoes. Criminal activities include drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, murder, burglary, prostitution, and theft.

The color red is the color for Bloods, although some sets may use green. Bloods refer to each other as Dawg, Damu, or Piru. Numbers and symbols depend on a set affiliation. The word “Piru” refers to the original Blood gang. Bloods use a crossed out “c” in words as disrespect for Crips. The word MOB means “Money Over Bitches.” Bloods are comprised of approximately 15,000 to 20,000 members. Criminal activities include drug trafficking, robbery, murder, burglary, prostitution, theft and extortion.

The Latin Kings (also known as the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation) is the most sizable Hispanic and Latino street gang across the globe. The gang was founded in Chicago, Illinois in 1954. Colors for the Latin Kings are black and gold. This gang makes use of a 5 or 3-point “sacred crown,” drawings of a lion and/or the “King Master,” and the acronyms LK, ALK, ALKN, ALKQN. Unlike most street gangs, the acceptance of female members is commonplace in most factions. Criminal activities include battery, extortion, robbery, murder, arms trafficking and drug trafficking.



The Aryan Brotherhood (AB), also known as the Brand, is a white supremacist prison gang and organized crime syndicate in the United States with roughly 20,000 members. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the gang makes up less than one-tenth of a percent of the prison population, but it is responsible for as many as 20% of the murders in the federal prison system. Throughout the state of Mississippi, there are approximately 400 known Aryan Brotherhood members consisting mostly of young white males. The Mississippi Brotherhood calls itself “the Family” and is ruled by a three-man “Wheel” that divides the state into nine zones.

The Wheel appoints a captain to oversee each zone and prison, with a network of sergeants-at-arms who enforce order and discipline, a treasurer to handle finances and numerous soldiers. Recruits are in “prospect status” for six months before they can be assigned a “blood in mission.” The gang was disrupted in 2016 when 42 members and associates were convicted of racketeering conspiracy, murder, and conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine. Representations common to the Aryan Brotherhood are: “Aryan Brotherhood,” “AB,” 666, Nazi symbolism such as SS, sig runes, and swastikas, as well as shamrocks and Celtic iconography. Criminal activities include drug trafficking, extortion, inmate prostitution and murder-for-hire.





The Mississippi Gulf Coast has a population of Asian gangs in the Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson County areas. Some of the Asian gangs known to authorities are: The Dragon Family/Royal Family, True Viet Boys (TVB), and the Viet Boyz (2202 VBZ). Junior members are called “Baby Gangsters” (aka “Boy Gangsters”; “Tiny Baby Gangsters”). The Dragon Family is a known rival of the Viet Boyz. The dragon is most often used to symbolize these gangs. The revenue from organized crime comes mainly from the extortion of brothels, prostitution, money laundering, the distribution of narcotics, and counterfeit merchandise. Criminal activities include

extortion, counterfeiting, prostitution, money laundering, drug trafficking, racketeering, murder, assault, robbery, arms trafficking, auto theft, and burglary. The Viet Boys are known as one of the most violent Asian gangs. They are typically known for their stubbornness and protecting their turf. They have approximately 1,300 to 2,000 members. This gang was created by Cambodians to protect their own people from getting attacked by Mexican gang members. The gang is allied with the Crips. Criminal activities include drug trafficking, robbery, assault, burglary, theft, homicide, and gambling.



OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

At the present time, Mississippi has three international Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs (OMG) which are the Sons of Silence, the Vagos and the Bandidos. The Bandidos and the Sons of Silence were the dominant OMG clubs in Mississippi and were two of the “Big Five OMG’s” in the nation. The “Big Five” consists of the five most notorious and violent motorcycle gangs in the United States. The Bandidos have chapters in the state located on the Gulf Coast, Jackson, Meridian, and North Mississippi. According to the American Motorcycle Association, 99% of motorcycle riders are law abiding citizens; thus, only one percent of all motorcycles are affiliated with a gang.



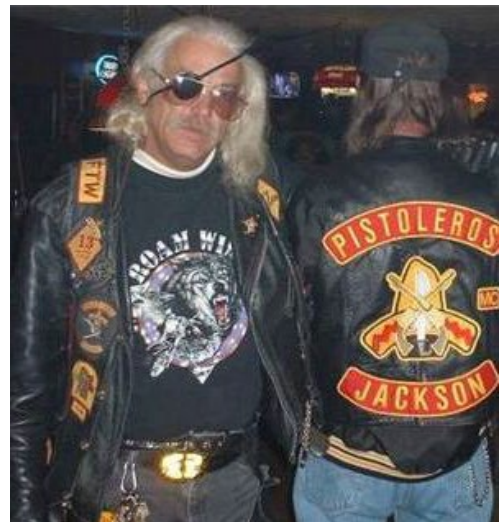
The FBI asserts that OMG's support themselves primarily through drug dealing, trafficking in stolen goods, and extortion. They typically fight over territory and the illegal drug trade and collect \$1 billion in illegal income annually.

Many jurisdictions have reported an increase in overall Motorcycle Club and Outlaw Motorcycle Gang activity in recent years. This activity has centered on increasing membership by patching smaller clubs into larger clubs. In some instances, support clubs have been used to increase the visual effect of a dominant club when it rides through an area. Clubs are also displaying colors and support stickers on motor vehicles.



According to the Mississippi Confederation of Clubs, the Bandidos OMG has chapters in Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Jackson, and Meridian. The Bandidos are one of the five main OMGs that pose a serious national domestic threat and conduct the majority of the criminal activity linked to OMGs. It is not uncommon to observe colors, decals, and other identifiers while in the communities.

The Pistoleros are a support club, or gang, for the Bandidos with five chapters in Mississippi located in Desoto, Lauderdale, Forest, Hinds and Harrison Counties. OMGs strive to initiate young members with no criminal history for the purpose of acquiring a gun permit or to purchase weapons. The criminal activities are the same as the majority of other OMG's which include drug distribution, stolen motorcycles, money laundering, other Racketeer Influenced Organizations, and Continuing Criminal Enterprise type violations.



The Sons of Silence OMG became a full charter chapter in Rankin County in October 2008. As with most other gangs, a chapter must have five members to receive full status as a chapter. MBN intelligence has identified three members of the Sons of Silence OMG in Rankin and Scott Counties. The Sons of Silence logo is an American eagle superimposed over the letter "A" (similar to, and taken from, the Anheuser-Busch logo) flying under an arch and their motto is "donec mors non separat ," Latin for "until death separates us."

The Galloping Goose motto is: "Often Tested, Always Faithful". Their colors are purple and gold and their patch consists of a set of legs running. The torso on top of the set of legs is a large hand with the middle finger extended. In the background of the patch you can see an outhouse, this links back to an outhouse which used to be towed on a trailer in the club's early years when they went on runs. The patch is purple writing on a gold background. The Galloping Goose OMG is a one percent club and their rules of behavior sometimes include violent crimes.



The Vagos' (also known as the Green Nation) motto is: "We Give What We Get." The Vagos arrived in Mississippi in 2011 and began wearing nomad cuts. They are an international one percent OMG and, as of late, have been involved in deadly confrontations with the Hells Angels. Vagos members were also confronted by members of the Sons of Silence (SOS) of Mississippi at a local bar and the SOS members took a set of Vagos' colors and assaulted a member. The Vagos Motorcycle Club patch consists of the Norse god of Mischief, Loki. He is depicted riding a motorcycle. One of the Vagos Motorcycle Club abbreviations is 22, referencing the 22nd letter of the alphabet. The Vagos Motorcycle Club color is green, which links back to the Mexican heritage of the Vagos Motorcycle Club founder. Vagos' also use the motto "VFFV," meaning "Vagos Forever Forever Vagos."

In 2013, the Iron Coffins initiated a local chapter in North Mississippi near Tupelo. The Iron Coffins originated out of Ohio in the 1960s and have chapters in several states in the Midwest, and now in Southern States. The Iron Coffins use the acronym "ICFFIC" which translates to "Iron Coffins Forever Forever Iron Coffins." The patch consists of a skeleton riding a motorcycle with wings. A biker displaying a 13 patch symbolizes that the biker either smokes marijuana, deals in it, or has a contact for methamphetamine. 666 displayed on a patch or tattoo, symbolizes the mark of Satan. 69 displayed on a patch or tattoo is symbolic of the well-known sexual position.

The Sin City Deciples motto is: Death before Dishonor. The Club also uses the abbreviation of "DFFD," which stands for "Deciples Forever Forever Deciples." Though most club members are black, the club is open to all men, regardless of race or color. The club is known to have approximately 4,900 members including some military veterans. Members ride Harley Davidson motorcycles. Members pride themselves on the tight knit brotherhood they have developed over years of riding with each other from state to state. The term



“1934 Express” is also used, relating to the 19th, 3rd and 4th letters of the alphabet (S, C, D) for Sin City Deciples.



The Outcast Motorcycle Club is a black one percenter motorcycle club founded in Detroit, Michigan in 1969. They are an all-black one percenter motorcycle club. After starting their Mother Chapter in Detroit, Michigan, they have grown to over 30 chapters in cities throughout the US. They do not have any chapters internationally. The Outcast Motorcycle Club patch is made up of a laughing skull, which has teeth and possibly cornrows. Behind the skull is an iron cross. The Outcast motto is “We Ride For Piece,” making note of the spelling of the word “piece,” rather than “peace.” Also used by the Outcast Motorcycle Club is the acronym of “OFFO,”

which stands for Outcast Forever, Forever Outcast.

IX. OUTLOOK

The United States continues to be a place where a person can live and make their dreams come true. While being a land of wealth, opportunity, and prosperity, the U. S. happens to be the most addicted country in the world. The illicit drug market in the United States is one of the most profitable in the world. As such, it attracts the most ruthless, sophisticated, and aggressive drug traffickers. The State of Mississippi, which lies along the Gulf of Mexico with multiple interstates running through it, is experiencing what may be determined as a struggle that is unwinnable. The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics (MBN) and other law enforcement agencies face an enormous challenge in protecting the citizens of Mississippi and its neighboring states against the perils of dangerous drugs. State and local law enforcement agree, and statistics confirm, that Mississippi has a significant drug problem. Fentanyl is an ever-increasing problem for the entire nation, including Mississippi. Unfortunately, fentanyl use can have lethal consequences. Methamphetamine is also a major problem in the state, while diverted pharmaceuticals holding on tight right behind methamphetamine. Fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin, and other pharmaceuticals remain closely associated with drug overdose deaths. Over the past few years, fentanyl has claimed more lives in this state than in years prior and is expected to continue. With regard to pharmaceutical diversion, in-state and out-of-state drug trafficking organizations, who specialize in pharmaceuticals, are targeting Mississippi pharmacies in an effort to acquire significant quantities of the most desired prescription medications for distribution and resale across the country. MBN believes that this trend will continue primarily due to the low acquisition cost of medications and the American public’s cessation for these drugs. Based on discussions with other law enforcement agencies around the country, Mississippi is not the only state that is being targeted, but certainly one that is very attractive to the DTOs. Marijuana, cocaine, and New Psychoactive Substances follow these. The transportation and distribution of vast quantities of Mexico-produced methamphetamine continues to be readily available in our state. The Mexico-produced methamphetamine is typically of high quality, or purity, and is relatively inexpensive. Mississippi also passed legislation placing pseudoephedrine back on the shelves as an over-the-counter (OTC)

medication, which took effect on January 1, 2022. MBN and our law enforcement partners continue to monitor the impact and will be prepared for an uptick in the local manufacturing of methamphetamine within our state. Cocaine has taken a back seat to other drugs, but an increase in availability will also be monitored. Mississippi has recently passed legislation to allow for medical marijuana use in our state, whereas there are many unknowns, to include how it will affect everyday life for Mississippi citizens. Current trends indicate that marijuana, which is grown and/or manufactured in-state, is not transported out-of-state, but is used locally in addition to the vast quantities imported from other areas like California, Colorado, and Washington. However, diversion of medicinal marijuana to out-of-state locations is a legitimate concern. Vaping continues to be an increased concern for the youth in Mississippi. Law enforcement in Mississippi has seized numerous amounts of vaping cartridges containing THC and other synthetic substances. Drug Trafficking Organizations continue to establish distribution routes in Mississippi dealing in bulk shipments. Mississippi continues to experience significant issues with drugs.

TRENDS

- The importation, distribution, and seizure of fentanyl from outside the state, continues to increase.
- Mississippi law enforcement continues to see counterfeit pharmaceuticals, containing fentanyl and other substances, sold in small and large quantities, being sold across the state.
- DTOs target Mississippi's pharmacies to acquire desired controlled medications, such as promethazine with codeine and pain pills, for distribution in our state and out-of-state.
- The importation, distribution, and seizure of methamphetamine from outside the state, continues to be readily available.
- Diverted pharmaceutical abuse remains constant.
- Vaping is increasing in popularity among Mississippi's youth.
- Dealers are using pesticides, fentanyl, and other additives to make their drugs more appealing for their customers.
- Overdose deaths related to fentanyl and fentanyl-laced drugs continues to increase due to the cheaper cost and availability of the drug.
- The presence of higher-grade marijuana has driven the price and popularity of marijuana higher than in previous years.
- The emergence of synthetic drugs used as an alternative means of getting high increased steadily, and other substances such as xylazine, dimethyltryptamine, eutylone, bromazolam, and clonazepam.
- Activity on the Dark Web, where subjects avoid traceable transactions of currency and drugs, has hit Mississippi.
- Kratom and other "legal highs" continue to be a thorn to law enforcement efforts in Mississippi's fight for public safety and public health.

DEVELOPMENTS

- The Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) has made it easier to track illegally diverted pharmaceuticals.
- The Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics continues to strengthen its coalition with the Mississippi Board of Pharmacy, Mississippi State Department of Health, Mississippi Department of Mental Health, and the Mississippi Public Health Institute to help combat drug abuse in the state.
- MBN continues to expand partnerships in the criminal justice field, the medical community, social services, and substance abuse and mental health for combined approaches and solutions to help reduce the increasing problem of drug use and abuse in the State of Mississippi.
- MBN continues to expand the Demand Reduction Unit, which is a training and education initiative to keep citizens and other law enforcement entities updated on trends seen across the state.
- Industrial hemp farms, or hemp grows, are still in Mississippi and operational.
- The Mississippi Legislature passed a law to allow Medical Marijuana, which is beginning to be sold out of dispensaries, and a lot of variables remain unknown.
- MBN is continuing to work with the medical community to combat public health and safety issues, such as heroin/fentanyl use and prescription drug abuse.

PREDICTIONS

- Vaping will become the most popular way for Mississippi's youth to consume drugs.
- Money laundering continues to become increasingly harder to discover due to the numerous methods of transferring funds digitally over the internet.
- More drug dealers/traffickers will use virtual currency in efforts to avoid cash seizures from law enforcement.
- An increase in and the expansion in the use of technology, such as encrypted apps, to conceal drug involved/related communications to thwart law enforcement's efforts to protect public safety and public health.
- MBN expects Mississippi to experience the diversion of Medical Marijuana within the state, as well potentially become a source state for areas with legalized medicinal marijuana.
- The production of new chemicals and compositions for manufacturing synthetic fentanyl and other synthetic substances will increase.
- Interstate transportation using private and public carriers and domestic aircraft will continue to be the primary method of trans-shipping narcotics across the state.
- Mississippi will see more of its youth enrolled in drug treatment programs.

- There will be an increase in availability of counterfeit substances across the state as the demand for pharmaceuticals continues to climb and shortages in desired drugs are experience.
- Abuse of synthetic drugs will continue to increase as people seek to obtain a legal high.
- More and more drugs will be abused utilizing vape pens. Abuse of synthetic drugs will continue to increase as people seek to obtain that legal high.
- Fentanyl will continue to be a desired drug, even though its use can be fatal, and Mississippi experiences increased fentanyl and other opioid-related overdose deaths.
- More and more drugs will be abused utilizing vape pens.

X. METHODOLOGY

The Mississippi Drug Threat Assessment is produced annually by MBN's Intelligence Division to identify and quantify the nature, extent, and scope of the threat of illegal drugs and related issues in Mississippi. This document includes information from previous MBN Drug Threat Assessments, surveys from local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, open source documents, law enforcement sensitive information from other investigative agencies, internet websites, and anecdotal information from other reliable sources.

In preparation of this report, MBN Intelligence Division personnel collected and analyzed the information required to quantify the threat and identify trafficking trends. The specific drug categories presented in the Mississippi Drug Threat Assessment are fentanyl, methamphetamine, diverted pharmaceuticals, cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and New Psychoactive Substances. The identification of specific intelligence gaps and projections for the future by drug type are also included. In addition, the Drug Threat Assessment identifies problems posed by the threat, the actions being taken by participating agencies, and the anticipated impact on the state.

XI. SOURCES

The following served as sources in the preparation of this document:

2018 Money Laundering Risk Assessment
2019 DEA National Drug Threat Assessment
2019 Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Drug Threat Assessment
2019 ROCIC Gang Report
2020 Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Drug Threat Assessment
2020 National Strategy for Combating Terrorist and Other Illicit Financing
2021 Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics Drug Threat Assessment
2024 Gulf Coast HIDTA Drug Threat Assessment Survey
American Motorcycle Association
Biker Digital.com
Blue Lighting Operations Center/Gulf Coast HIDTA Watch Center
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Clarion Ledger
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Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
Federal and Drug Administration (FDA)
Federation of State Medical Boards
Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN)
Harrison County Sheriff's Office
High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Performance Management Process
IBISWorld
International Trade Administration
Minnesota Department of Health
Mississippi Board of Pharmacy (MBP)
Mississippi Department of Agriculture (MDA)
Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)
Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDEC)
Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH)
Mississippi Forensics Laboratory (MFL)
Mississippi Gaming Commission (MGC)
Mississippi Lottery Corporation
Mississippi Prescription Monitoring Program (MS PMP)
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DRUG PRICES ACROSS MISSISSIPPI

Drug Type	Weight	Jackson	Greenwood	Oxford	Tupelo	Starkville	Meridian	Hattiesburg	Gulfport	McComb
Powder Cocaine	Gram	\$20-\$40	\$80-100	\$60-120	\$100	\$80-100	\$60-80	\$100-120	\$100	\$50
	Eight-Ball	\$100	\$200-250	\$150-250	\$175-225	\$250	\$150-200	\$250-300	\$200	\$160
	Ounce	\$1,000	\$850	\$1000-1,200	\$900-1,100	\$1,200	\$1,000-1,200	\$1,000-1,200	\$700	\$1000
	¼ Kilo	\$5,000	\$6,000-10,000	\$6,000-9,000	\$4,800-6,500	\$6,200	\$7,000-8,000	\$7,000-10,000	\$5,000	N/A
	½ Kilo	\$10,000-12,000	\$14,000-19,000	\$15,000	\$9,000-12,000	\$15,000-16,000	\$15,000-16,000	\$15,000-19,000	\$9,000	N/A
Crack Cocaine	Kilogram	\$18,000-24,000	\$34,000-37,000	\$30,000-37,000	\$18,000-24,000	\$32,000	\$30,000-32,000	\$32,000-36,000	\$18,000-22,000	N/A
	Rock	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20
	Gram	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$100	\$80-100	\$80-100	\$100	\$100	\$40
	Eight-Ball	\$200-225	\$200-250	\$150 – 175	\$175-250	\$150	\$250	\$200	\$200	\$140
	Ounce	\$1,000-1,200	\$750-1,000	\$1,000	\$900-1,100	\$1,100	\$1,000-1,200	\$1,400-1,800	\$700	\$750
Marijuana	¼ Kilo	\$5,000-8,000	\$5,000-8,000	\$6,500	\$6,800-8,500	\$7,500	\$8,000	\$7,000-10,000	\$6,000	N/A
	Kilogram	N/A	\$25,000 - 30,000	\$28,000-36,000	\$28,000	\$30,000-32,000	\$30,000-34,000	\$30,000-34,000	\$30,000	N/A
	Dime Bag	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10	\$10
	20-Sack	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$20
	¼ Ounce	\$35	\$35-40	\$40	\$40	\$40	\$35-40	\$40	\$35	\$35-40
BC BUD	Ounce	\$100	\$60-120	\$100-150	\$80-140	\$80	\$60-100	\$50-100	\$100	\$400 high \$250 med \$60 low
	¼ Pound	\$400	\$125-450	\$350	\$180-200	\$250-350	\$250	\$200-300	\$400	N/A
	½ Pound	\$800	\$220-800	\$600-700	\$250-300	\$500-600	\$450	\$250-450	\$800	N/A
	Pound	\$1,200	\$600-800	\$1,000-1,200	\$800-1,200	\$800-1,200	\$800-1,000	\$500-700	\$600	N/A
	Ounce	\$250	\$350-850	\$500-600	\$400	\$500	\$300- 400	\$150-200	\$250	N/A
BC BUD	¼ Pound	\$700-1,200	\$700-2,500	\$1,000-2,000	\$1,500	\$1,500-1,600	\$1,200-1,300	\$1,000-1,200	\$700	N/A
	½ Pound	\$1,200-1,500	\$1,500-4,000	\$2,500-3,500	\$3,500	\$3,000-3,200	\$2,500-3,000	\$1,500-2,000	\$1,200	N/A
	Pound	\$3,000	\$5,000-5,500	\$5,000-7,000	\$5,000-7,000	\$5,100	\$4,500-5,000	\$3,000-3,500	\$3,000	N/A

Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics

Drug Type	Weight	Jackson	Greenwood	Oxford	Tupelo	Starkville	Meridian	Hattiesburg	Gulfport	McComb
LSD	Dosage Unit	N/A	\$10	\$10-15	\$12	\$10-12	\$8-10	\$5-10	N/A	N/A
MDMA	Dosage Unit	N/A	\$10-20	\$25-40	\$25-40	\$25-35	\$2	\$5-25	\$12-15	\$5-10
Meth	Gram	\$10	\$50-60	\$50-75	\$20-30	\$40	\$30-40	\$30-60	\$80	\$50
	Eight-Ball	\$35	\$100-200	\$150-200	\$75-90	\$75-150	\$60-100	\$75-150	\$150	\$160
	Ounce	\$175	\$325-500	\$400-700	\$175-250	\$275	\$250-400	\$250-550	\$600	\$1,000
	Pound	\$1,800	\$2,500-3,000	N/A	\$2,200-2,500	\$5,000-6,000	\$3,000-5,000	\$2,000-4,000	\$5,500	N/A
Heroin	Gram	\$150	\$120 - 200	\$200-250	\$222-250	\$250	\$200-250	\$100-200	\$200	\$200
	Ounce	\$2,000	\$2,500	\$1,750-3,000	\$3,000	\$1,750-\$2,000	\$4,000	\$1,400-2,200	\$2,400	N/A
	¼ Kilo	N/A	\$15,000-18,000	\$15,000-18,000	\$15,000-18,000	\$15,750	N/A	\$12,000-16,000	N/A	N/A
	1 Kilo	\$60,000-80,000	\$80,000-85,000	\$70,000-75,000	\$30,000-50,000	\$80,000	N/A	\$45,000-65,000	N/A	N/A

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