



U.S. Department of Justice  
National Drug Intelligence Center



# Puerto Rico/ U.S. Virgin Islands High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



## Drug Market Analysis 2011

## **Source Summary Statement**

The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) has high confidence in this drug market analysis as it is based on multiple sources of information that have proved highly reliable in prior NDIC, law enforcement, and intelligence community reporting. Quantitative data, including seizure, eradication, and arrest statistics, were drawn from data sets maintained by federal, state, or local government agencies. Discussions of the prevalence and consequences of drug abuse are based on published reports from U.S. Government agencies and interviews with public health officials deemed reliable because of their expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of drug abuse. Trends and patterns related to drug production, trafficking, and abuse were identified through detailed analysis of coordinated counterdrug agency reporting and information. NDIC intelligence analysts and field intelligence officers obtained this information through numerous interviews with law enforcement and public health officials (federal, state, and local) in whom NDIC has a high level of confidence based on previous contact and reporting, their recognized expertise, and their professional standing and reputation within the U.S. counterdrug community. This report was reviewed and corroborated by law enforcement officials who have jurisdiction in the Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and possess an expert knowledge of its drug situation.



**U.S. Department of Justice  
National Drug Intelligence Center**



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## **Drug Market Analysis 2011**

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



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## Executive Summary

The overall drug threat to the Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands (PR/USVI) High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) has remained relatively consistent over the past year. Drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) transport multikilogram quantities of cocaine and South American (SA) heroin through the PR/USVI HIDTA region en route to drug markets in the continental United States (CONUS). While most of the cocaine and heroin arriving in the region is further transported to the CONUS for distribution, a portion remains in the HIDTA region for local distribution and consumption. As a result, cocaine trafficking and heroin abuse are the principal drug threats to the PR/USVI HIDTA region. In addition, cannabis cultivation and the subsequent distribution and abuse of marijuana pose serious threats to the region. Murders and incidents of violence linked to cocaine trafficking have increased in Puerto Rico over the past year, resulting in widespread fear among the general population because of the often indiscriminate nature of the violence.

Key issues identified in the PR/USVI HIDTA region include the following:

- Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs have shifted some of their cocaine air transportation routes from the Dominican Republic to the eastern Caribbean in the vicinity of the British Virgin Islands and the USVI.<sup>1</sup>
- Cocaine continues to pose the greatest drug threat to the region because of the continued high level of trafficking in the PR/USVI HIDTA region.
- The number of murders and other violent incidents linked to cocaine trafficking increased in Puerto Rico during the past year.
- Heroin abuse is prevalent in Puerto Rico, with high rates of bacterial and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections occurring among heroin abusers, who typically inject the drug.
- The PR/USVI HIDTA region is a major bulk cash movement center for drug traffickers operating in the region and the CONUS.

## Key Issues<sup>a</sup>

**Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs have shifted some of their cocaine air transportation routes from the Dominican Republic to the eastern Caribbean in the vicinity of the British Virgin Islands and the USVI.<sup>2</sup>**

Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs, the primary sources of supply for Dominican and Puerto Rican DTOs operating in the PR/USVI HIDTA region, have traditionally used aircraft taking off from Venezuela to air-drop hundred-kilogram loads of cocaine into the waters off the southern and eastern Dominican Republic coasts.<sup>3</sup> To counteract this trafficking route, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF South), and Dominican Republic Tactical Response Team initiated Operation Broken Bridge in 2008<sup>4</sup> to identify and disrupt cocaine shipments sent from Venezuela to the Dominican Republic on noncommercial flights. Over the past 2 years, U.S. and Dominican law enforcement air assets have been successful in intercepting suspect aircraft and have seized cocaine loads air-dropped into the sea.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Dominican Republic law enforcement officials have arrested members of the local Dominican DTOs and criminal groups.<sup>6</sup> In response to these operations, Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs have shifted some of their cocaine air transportation routes from the Dominican Republic to the eastern Caribbean in the vicinity of the British Virgin Islands and the USVI.<sup>7</sup> To illustrate, the number of suspect noncommercial aircraft departing from Venezuela for the Dominican Republic, as reported by JIATF South, decreased from 2008 through 2010, while the number of noncommercial flights departing from Venezuela for the Virgin Islands modestly increased during the same period.<sup>8</sup> In addition, DEA reports that cocaine seizures along maritime routes between the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico increased from 2 metric tons in 2009 to 7 metric tons in the first 3 quarters of 2010.<sup>9</sup> Increased air transportation of cocaine to the eastern Caribbean is further evidenced by National Seizure System (NSS) data indicating that cocaine seizures in the USVI increased from 8.44 kilograms in 2009 to 394.06 kilograms in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs are able to successfully air-drop cocaine in the eastern Caribbean because of the vast area and multiple islands in the vicinity of the Virgin Islands. Local traffickers, who typically retrieve these shipments and transport them in boats to the British Virgin Islands, are often able to complete their activities before interdiction forces—which are limited in number<sup>11</sup>—can pinpoint the air-drop location and respond.<sup>12</sup> Once the shipments arrive in the British Virgin Islands, most of the cocaine is further transported to the USVI or Puerto Rico, with a portion remaining on the islands for local distribution.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this shift in air transportation routes from Venezuela, the Dominican Republic remains the principal transit area for cocaine and heroin transported into and through the PR/USVI HIDTA region.<sup>14</sup> Most of the cocaine smuggled into the HIDTA continues to be transported from South America via cargo in maritime vessels or by courier aboard commercial aircraft into the Dominican Republic.<sup>15</sup> Dominican DTOs, under the ultimate operational control of Colombian DTOs, coordinate drug shipments from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico using privately owned boats, such as *yolas*,<sup>b</sup> yachts, and other vessels longer than 30 feet equipped with hidden

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a. For a general overview of the drug threat in the Puerto Rico/USVI HIDTA region, see [Appendix A](#).

b. *Yolas* are traditional Puerto Rican fishing boats.



compartments, and noncommercial aircraft.<sup>16</sup> (See text box.) Once the shipments reach Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico-based traffickers set aside a portion of the drugs to supply local drug markets and then transport the remainder to the CONUS by commercial air and maritime conveyances.<sup>17</sup> Common destinations for CONUS-bound drugs from Puerto Rico include Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, and Orlando (FL); Newark (NJ); and Albany and Rochester (NY).<sup>18</sup>

**Cocaine continues to pose the greatest drug threat to the region because of the continued high level of trafficking in the PR/USVI HIDTA region.**

Law enforcement reporting, seizure data, and price information all indicate high levels of cocaine availability in the region.<sup>19</sup> The DEA San Juan District Office reports that problems attendant to high levels of cocaine availability and trafficking include violence, crime, and murder.<sup>20,21</sup> PR/USVI HIDTA officials report that large amounts of powder cocaine are typically seized in the region and that amounts increased significantly from 2009 (3,667 kilograms) through 2010 (6,464 kilograms).<sup>22</sup> In fact, more cocaine was seized through HIDTA initiatives than any other illicit drug in 2010.<sup>23</sup> (See Table 1 on page 4.) Cocaine prices declined overall from 2008 to 2010, suggesting that cocaine availability increased during that period.<sup>c</sup> The DEA Caribbean Division reports that the average price for a kilogram of cocaine in the HIDTA region decreased from a range of \$28,000 to \$30,000 in October 2008 to a range of \$16,800 to \$21,000 in October 2010.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the DEA San Juan District reports that crack cocaine is the drug that most contributes to violent crime in the HIDTA region.<sup>25</sup>

**Caribbean Corridor Strike Force Intercepts 290 Pounds of Cocaine Near the Puerto Rican Coast**

During a routine patrol in March 2011, a CBP surveillance aircraft detected two suspicious vessels engaged in what appeared to be an at-sea transfer of contraband. After the cargo transfer took place, the CBP air crew observed one vessel heading toward the Dominican Republic and the other toward Puerto Rico. The CBP Caribbean Air and Maritime Branch notified the U.S. Coast Guard Sector San Juan and other CBP agents to support a combined Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF)<sup>i</sup> interdiction effort.

CBP marine interdiction agents responded and intercepted a *yo/a*-type vessel with two people onboard approximately 6 miles northwest of Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. A subsequent search of the vessel revealed approximately 132 bricks that field-tested positive for cocaine. The suspect vessel was taken to CBP Mayagüez Marine Unit, where the cocaine (with an estimated street value of \$3 million) and the two U.S. citizens onboard were later turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations and DEA agents assigned to the CCSF.<sup>26</sup>

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration.

i. The CCSF is a joint Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) Strike Force-HIDTA initiative to investigate South American-based DTOs responsible for the movement of multikilogram quantities of illicit drugs using the Caribbean as a transportation point for further shipment and distribution in the CONUS. The CCSF member agencies are the U.S. Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico, ICE's Office of Homeland Security Investigations, DEA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, CBP, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Puerto Rico Police Department.

c. Sporadic cocaine shortages and higher cocaine prices were reported by several law enforcement agencies in Puerto Rico during the second half of 2008 and early 2009.

**Table 1. Drug Seizures by Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands HIDTA, in Kilograms, 2009–2010**

Drug	2009	2010
<b>Powder Cocaine</b>	3,666.92	6,464.09
<b>Crack Cocaine</b>	2.35	9.37
<b>Heroin</b>	81.48	9.68
<b>Methamphetamine</b>	0.00	0.00
<b>Ice Methamphetamine</b>	0.00	0.00
<b>Marijuana</b>	11,827.31	1,916.32

Source: Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, as of March 11, 2011.

**The number of murders and other violent incidents linked to cocaine trafficking increased in Puerto Rico during the past year.**

Murder rates in Puerto Rico are among the highest in the United States and are increasing.<sup>27</sup> The Puerto Rico Police Department (PRPD) reports that the number of murders in Puerto Rico increased from 901 in 2009 to 983 in 2010.<sup>28</sup> The resulting 2010 murder rate per 100,000 inhabitants in Puerto Rico was 26, up from 23 in 2009 and more than 5 times the murder rate per 100,000 population in the United States in 2009 (the latest year for which complete data are available).<sup>29</sup> The DEA Caribbean Division reports that many of the murders in Puerto Rico are linked to cocaine trafficking.<sup>30</sup>

Violence is widespread among the many retail-level drug distributors in the region.<sup>31</sup> In Puerto Rico, Dominican and Puerto Rican traffickers routinely use intimidation and violence—including murder—to gain and retain control of the retail drug markets.<sup>4,32</sup> In the USVI, local independent distributors also commit violent crimes to maintain or gain control of the retail markets.<sup>33</sup> Violence by drug traffickers in the region has become indiscriminate, endangering the lives of public housing residents and innocent bystanders.<sup>34</sup> For example, instead of single acts of violence targeting specific traffickers, numerous Dominican and Puerto Rican traffickers now fire their weapons simultaneously at other traffickers with little regard for collateral damage.<sup>35</sup> The first instance of this type of violence, the “Tombola Massacre,”<sup>36</sup> occurred in October 2009 when members of the Alexis Candelario-Santana criminal group used rifles and automatic weapons to attack a rival trafficker at a nightclub in Toa Baja, Puerto Rico; eight bystanders were killed, and more than 20 people were wounded.<sup>37</sup> The successful dismantling of three major DTOs, including the José David Figueroa-Agosto, also referred to as the Jr. Cápsula DTO, by federal and local law enforcement agencies has provided opportunity to other trafficking groups to contend

d. Most of the 332 public housing projects in Puerto Rico are known to have drug distribution points (*puntos*) that are operated by drug point controllers (*dueño, bichote*). Many public housing projects have several distribution points at which cocaine, among other drugs, is sold. The drug point controller may hire a manager for the drug point as well as runners. The runners are often children as young as 12 who move the drugs from stash locations to distribution points. Traffickers use children because they are less conspicuous to law enforcement surveillance and are prosecuted as juveniles if caught.

for drug distribution points (*puntos*) formerly controlled by the dismantled DTOs, causing considerable rivalry among traffickers.<sup>38</sup> The DEA Caribbean Division reports that other, smaller DTOs are now fighting with each other to gain control of these *puntos*, thereby increasing the level of violence in Puerto Rico.<sup>39</sup>

**Heroin abuse is prevalent throughout Puerto Rico, with high rates of bacterial and HIV infections occurring among heroin abusers, who typically inject the drug.**

Law enforcement and public health officials report that heroin abuse remains prevalent in Puerto Rico, despite a decline in the number of individuals seeking treatment for addiction at public facilities.<sup>40</sup> Local law enforcement officials interviewed in early 2011 indicated that heroin is readily available throughout Puerto Rico and is the primary drug abuse problem on the island.<sup>41</sup> In fact, during each year since 2006, there have been more treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Puerto Rico for heroin than for any other illicit drug, according to Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) data.<sup>42</sup> However, despite high levels of heroin admissions, the overall number of treatment admissions for all drugs in Puerto Rico has declined over the past 4 years—a reflection of resource limitations rather than declining levels of drug abuse.<sup>43</sup> (See Table 2.)

**Table 2. Substance Abuse Treatment Admissions, Puerto Rico, 2006–2010**

Drug	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Cocaine (smoked and other routes)	110	250	243	155	69
Marijuana	227	479	410	255	113
Heroin	1,422	1,645	1,297	734	293
Other Opiates	6	34	36	35	26
Amphetamines (including methamphetamine)	NR	2	1	NR	NR

Source: Treatment Episode Data Set, data run date February 17, 2011.

Note: The USVI does not participate in the Treatment Episode Data Set.

NR—Not reported

Some heroin abusers in Puerto Rico continue to share needles with one another, resulting in high rates of bacterial and HIV infection among the abuser population.<sup>44</sup> Puerto Rico law enforcement and health officials report that many heroin abusers on the island suffer from bacterial infections that eventually require medical treatment and can lead to organ failure and death.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that drug abuse, particularly heroin abuse, is the principal means by which HIV is spread in Puerto Rico.<sup>46</sup> In 2009, the Puerto Rico Department of Health and CDC analyzed data on diagnoses of HIV infections that occurred in 2006 (the most recent data available) and found that an estimated 1,440 individuals aged 13 years and over were newly infected with HIV in Puerto Rico, resulting in an estimated incidence of 45 cases per 100,000 population, twice the U.S. average.<sup>47</sup> Injection drug use was the most common mode of HIV transmission in Puerto Rico in 2006.<sup>48</sup> To address transmission of infections among injection drug users, the Puerto Rico Department of Health provides syringe exchange programs and rapid HIV testing, allows pharmacies to sell syringes without medical prescriptions, and provides drug rehabilitation services throughout the island. The effectiveness of these programs, however, is unknown at this time.<sup>49</sup>

Heroin abuse in Puerto Rico is also associated with property crime in the region. The DEA Caribbean Division reports that heroin is the drug that most contributes to property crime in Puerto Rico, as heroin abusers commit robberies and burglaries to fund their abuse.<sup>50</sup>

**The PR/USVI HIDTA region is a major bulk cash movement center for drug traffickers operating in the region and the CONUS.**

Most of the bulk currency that passes through Puerto Rico originates on the east coast of the CONUS, primarily Miami (FL) and New York,<sup>51</sup> and flows to Colombian DTOs in Latin American countries.<sup>52</sup> The PR/USVI HIDTA reports that the leaders of high-profile money laundering organizations, primarily those based in South American countries, maintain money laundering cells in Puerto Rico and the USVI.<sup>53</sup> These cells launder illicit drug proceeds generated by traffickers operating in the HIDTA region and the CONUS, often using financial institutions, money remitters, shell corporations, and trade-based money laundering methods, such as the Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE), as well as bulk cash smuggling.<sup>54</sup> (See text box on page 7.)

Law enforcement reporting and seizure data indicate that bulk cash smuggling into the region occurs at high levels. The DEA Caribbean Division reports that bulk cash smuggling in Puerto Rico surged in 2009 and remained high through 2010.<sup>55</sup> For example, bulk cash seizures in Puerto Rico more than doubled from \$3.5 million in 2008 to almost \$7.4 million in 2009.<sup>56</sup> Bulk cash seizures by the DEA Caribbean Division remained high in 2010, with more than \$6.7 million seized.<sup>57</sup> The amount of bulk cash seized in Puerto Rico is much higher than the amount that can be generated through local drug sales, indicating that bulk cash is being smuggled from the CONUS to the island.<sup>58</sup> To illustrate, DEA agents assigned to the PR/USVI HIDTA seized \$375,000 from a suspect attempting to board a commercial aircraft that was flying from San Juan to Caracas, Venezuela. This encounter led to the seizure of an additional \$2.6 million in the suspect's condominium in Isla Verde, Puerto Rico.<sup>59</sup> Law enforcement officials hypothesize that traffickers conduct bulk cash smuggling through Puerto Rico because broker fees are lower than in the CONUS. Further, the presence of large amounts of U.S. currency on the island is not unusual, because Puerto Ricans generally use cash to transact most of their business, enabling illicit proceeds to be easily commingled with legitimate business proceeds.<sup>60</sup>

Bulk cash proceeds are generally moved into the PR/USVI HIDTA region by couriers aboard commercial aircraft, through package delivery services, and through shipping containers at the Port of San Juan.<sup>61</sup> The Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (LMMIA) is frequently used by couriers to transport bulk cash into Puerto Rico, as are airports in Aguadilla, Mayagüez, and Ponce.<sup>62</sup> Money launderers also use express mail parcels to move bulk cash through the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) LMMIA postal processing facility.<sup>63</sup> Many of the express mail parcels containing bulk cash that were seized at the LMMIA in 2010 originated in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York.<sup>64</sup> Once in Puerto Rico, the bulk cash is typically stored in stash houses until it is moved to its final destination.<sup>65</sup> Most of the bulk cash is further transported by couriers from Puerto Rico using private and commercial air or maritime conveyances to the Dominican Republic or other Latin American countries, such as Panama, where it can easily be placed and incorporated into the BMPE.<sup>66</sup>

### Money Laundering Methods Used in Puerto Rico

Money laundering cells of large DTOs launder illicit drug proceeds in Puerto Rico using financial institutions, such as banks and money remitters, and trade-based money laundering.<sup>67</sup> The DEA Caribbean Division reports that Colombia- and Venezuela-based DTOs frequently direct money laundering cells in Puerto Rico to use structured deposits to place illegal proceeds into bank accounts in Puerto Rico and then funnel the money—via wire transfers—to accounts in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.<sup>68</sup> Trade-based money laundering is an alternative remittance system used by drug traffickers in the region. For example, in December 2010, 13 individuals who were indicted for money laundering by a federal grand jury were arrested by ICE agents in Puerto Rico, where the defendants had allegedly attempted to launder approximately \$8 million, \$4 million of which was seized by the ICE agents. The investigation revealed that the defendants had used the BMPE to launder the illegal proceeds of DTOs through electronic transfers to China, Hong Kong, Colombia, Sweden, Panama, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States.<sup>69</sup> Traffickers also regularly transport cash in bulk through Puerto Rico en route to Latin American countries.

Source: Drug Enforcement Administration, Caribbean Division; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

## Outlook

NDIC assesses with high confidence<sup>e</sup> that cocaine trafficking will remain the primary drug threat to the PR/USVI HIDTA region in the near term. NDIC assesses with medium confidence that cocaine trafficking will intensify if Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs increasingly use the northeastern Caribbean as their preferred route to transport cocaine into the HIDTA region. Consequently, the primary flow of cocaine to the CONUS and the secondary flow to the HIDTA region will also increase. NDIC assesses with medium confidence that the high level of violence in the PR/USVI HIDTA region will continue over the next 12 to 18 months because of the rivalry among drug traffickers over *puntos*. NDIC assesses with high confidence that heroin abuse will be the primary drug abuse concern in the region in the near term.

e. **High Confidence** generally indicates that the judgments are based on high-quality information or that the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment. **Medium Confidence** generally means that the information is credibly sourced and plausible but can be interpreted in various ways, or is not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. **Low Confidence** generally means that the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make a solid analytic inference, or that there are significant concerns or problems with the sources.



## Appendix A. PR/USVI HIDTA Region Overview

Map A1. Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



The PR/USVI HIDTA region consists of the commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the island archipelago of the USVI, which encompasses St. Croix, St. John, St. Thomas, and several other, smaller islands.<sup>70</sup> (See Map A1.) The HIDTA region was established to combat the transshipment of illicit drugs from South America through Puerto Rico and the USVI to the CONUS and to target the distribution of illicit drugs within the region.<sup>71</sup>

The PR/USVI HIDTA region is located along established drug trafficking routes in the eastern Caribbean between South America and the CONUS. Most of the cocaine smuggled into the HIDTA continues to be transported from South America via cargo in maritime vessels or by courier aboard commercial aircraft into the Dominican Republic.<sup>72</sup> Dominican DTOs, under the ultimate operational control of Colombian DTOs, coordinate drug shipments from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico using privately owned boats, such as yolas, yachts, and other vessels longer than 30 feet equipped with hidden compartments, and noncommercial aircraft.<sup>73</sup> Colombian and Venezuelan DTOs have shifted some of their cocaine air transportation routes from the



Dominican Republic to the eastern Caribbean in the vicinity of the British Virgin Islands and the USVI.<sup>74</sup> The U.S. territories of Puerto Rico and the USVI represent the southernmost point of entry into the United States for people and goods; shipping from the islands to other parts of the United States is considered to be coastwise trade. As such, the region is a U.S. arrival zone for illicit drugs transported from South America, particularly cocaine destined for U.S. drug markets.<sup>75</sup> PR/USVI HIDTA officials estimate that DTOs transport multikilogram quantities of cocaine and SA heroin through the HIDTA region en route to drug markets in the CONUS.<sup>76</sup>

The movement of illicit drugs by containerized cargo is the principal smuggling threat to the HIDTA region.<sup>77</sup> The vast and increasing quantity of goods transshipped through the region every year provides drug traffickers with ample opportunity to smuggle illicit drugs into and through the region. Law enforcement officials can inspect only a fraction of the shipping containers arriving at ports in the HIDTA region, a situation that is reportedly exploited by DTOs. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, less than 2 percent of the 14,321 containers examined in Puerto Rico were inspected for illicit drugs in 2010.<sup>78</sup> The Port of San Juan is the island's largest seaport and is a major transshipment venue for cocaine and SA heroin; small boats from the Dominican Republic are also used by traffickers to smuggle additional amounts of these drugs into the HIDTA region.<sup>79</sup> The Port of San Juan is ideal for DTOs to conceal drugs and bulk cash in cargo containers because of the huge volume of containers transiting the port. In 2009 (the latest year for which data are available), the port ranked fifth in North America in container traffic, with more than 1,600,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs).<sup>80</sup> The large volume of containerized traffic passing through the Port of San Juan enables DTOs to commingle illicit drug shipments with large shipments of legitimate goods.<sup>81</sup> For example, in October 2010, CBP officers in San Juan discovered an anomaly in a cargo container while inspecting a vessel arriving from Vaucedo, Dominican Republic. A physical inspection revealed two duffel bags containing 55 kilograms of cocaine.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the Port of The Americas, an expansion project of the Port of Ponce in Puerto Rico, represents an additional maritime containerized cargo threat.<sup>83</sup>

Traffickers also smuggle drugs through airports in the region.<sup>84</sup> The LMMIA near San Juan is a major gateway for cocaine and heroin transported from the Dominican Republic and South America to Puerto Rico and then on to the CONUS.<sup>85</sup> For example, in August 2010, a federal grand jury indicted six individuals for conspiring to import illicit drugs into Puerto Rico and the CONUS from the Dominican Republic.<sup>86</sup> The group used couriers who either ingested heroin pellets or retrieved luggage containing kilogram quantities of cocaine that had been placed onto commercial aircraft by corrupt private luggage handlers at LMMIA.<sup>87</sup> Upon arriving at their destination in the CONUS, the couriers would meet their contacts and expel the heroin or deliver the cocaine-laden luggage.<sup>88</sup>

Cocaine trafficking and heroin abuse are the principal drug threats to the PR/USVI HIDTA region.<sup>89</sup> (See [Key Issues section](#).) In addition, cannabis cultivation, along with subsequent distribution and abuse of marijuana, pose serious threats to the region.<sup>90</sup> Marijuana is widely available and frequently abused in the region.<sup>91</sup> Most of the marijuana available in the HIDTA region is produced in Mexico, transported by Mexican traffickers across the U.S.–Mexico border into California and Texas, and then further transported to Puerto Rico and the USVI by parcel delivery services.<sup>92</sup> Law enforcement officers in Orlando (FL) report that Mexican traffickers working with Puerto Rican DTOs are transporting large quantities of Mexican marijuana from Mexico to Puerto Rico via the



USPS, using Orlando as a transshipment area.<sup>93</sup> Some marijuana available in the HIDTA region is produced from cannabis cultivated in the region. Other dangerous drugs, primarily MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy) and controlled prescription drugs are distributed and abused in the region but pose a much lesser threat than cocaine, heroin, or marijuana.<sup>94</sup> There is no indication that methamphetamine is produced or distributed in the region.<sup>95</sup>



## Endnotes

1. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Caribbean Division, interview by National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) intelligence analyst (IA), January 25, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC Request for Information (RFI), February 3, 2011.
2. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
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4. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011; U.S. State Department, “Venezuela,” *International Narcotics Control Situation Report (INCSR) 2010*, <[www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2010/vol1/137199.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2010/vol1/137199.htm)>, accessed January 10, 2011.
5. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
6. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, March 9, 2011.
7. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
8. Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF South), response to NDIC RFI, April 29, 2011.
9. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011.
10. El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), National Seizure System (NSS) data for 2009–2010, run date May 31, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
11. Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands (PR/USVI) High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), interview by NDIC IA, March 14, 2011.
12. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, March 9, 2011.
13. PR/USVI HIDTA, interview by NDIC IA, March 14, 2011.
14. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 27, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
15. DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 25, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, interview by NDIC IA, January 27, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
16. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), interview by NDIC IA, January 27, 2011.
17. PR/USVI HIDTA, interview by NDIC IA, January 27, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
18. DEA Caribbean Division, response to NDIC RFI, February 3, 2011.
19. NDIC, National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2011; PR/USVI HIDTA, response to NDIC RFI, March 9, 2011; DEA Caribbean Division, *Cocaine Pricing Information, Fiscal Year (FY) 2010-1QFY2011*.
20. NDIC, NDTS 2011.
21. NDIC, NDTS 2011.
22. PR/USVI HIDTA, response to NDIC RFI, March 9, 2011.
23. PR/USVI HIDTA, response to NDIC RFI, March 9, 2011.
24. DEA Caribbean Division, *Cocaine Pricing Information, Fiscal Year (FY) 2010-1QFY2011*.
25. NDIC, NDTS 2011.
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Puerto Rico Police Department

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Executive Office of the President  
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        High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas  
        Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
    U.S. Census Bureau  
U.S. Department of Defense  
    Joint Interagency Task Force South  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
    Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
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        Office of Applied Studies  
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U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
    U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
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U.S. Department of Justice  
    Drug Enforcement Administration  
        Caribbean Field Division  
        San Juan District Office  
        El Paso Intelligence Center  
        National Seizure System  
    Federal Bureau of Investigation

### **Other**

Alliance to Reduce the Insufficiency in Drug Addiction Treatment in Puerto Rico  
American Association of Port Authorities

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