

# Northwest HIDTA



Serving the needs of fourteen Northwest Counties:  
Benton, Clark, Cowlitz, Franklin, King, Kitsap, Lewis,  
Pierce, Skagit, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston, Whatcom,  
and Yakima.



**Spotlight on  
the Border**

There has been a dramatic increase in the seizures of pharmaceutical grade powdered ephedrine and MDMA (ecstasy) along the United States–Canada border. It is believed that the Pacific Northwest is a transshipment point for ecstasy being smuggled into the United States from British Columbia, Canada. This is evidenced by seizures of ecstasy occurring in other areas of the United States originating from Washington State. For example on August 17, 2005, the Wyoming Highway Patrol seized 4,000 MDMA tablets and just over 1 KG of methamphetamine. This shipment was allegedly headed to Georgia from Seattle, WA.

The British Columbia commercial truck and trailer (Photo 2) was stopped at the Pacific Highway, Port of Entry, Blaine, WA and referred to VACIS (x-ray) for inspection. The driver reported that the empty trailer was to be delivered to Wenatchee, WA. The inspection revealed an anomaly within the doors of the trailer, and upon further inspection plastic bags containing ephedrine were discovered.



Photo 1

Recent seizures along the United States–Canada border include ephedrine, marijuana, and cocaine. On November 16, 2005, 52.1 KG of ephedrine was discovered hidden within a commercial truck trying to cross into the United States. (photo 1)



Photo 2

On October 20, 2005, at the border crossing at Sumas, WA, 151.24 KG of marijuana were seized. During an inspection of a horse trailer a space discrepancy was noted on the interior of the trailer. A total of 10 hockey bags of marijuana (photo 3) were discovered in a hidden compartment inside a horse trailer. The truck and trailer were reportedly taking a horse to be trained in Granite Falls, WA.



Photo 3

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Dave Rodriguez

## Director's Message

On November 30, 2005, the President signed into law H.R. 3058, the "Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, the District of Columbia, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006" which among other things funds ONDCP and the HIDTA program for FY 2006. It is also expected that the Award Letters, to each of the fiduciaries, will be received by the beginning of March.

On October 25<sup>th</sup> we had our first on site Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) review by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) at the offices of the NW HIDTA. Four Task Force Commanders participated in this review. The ONDCP reviewers were most impressed with the quality of investigations being pursued and the accuracy of the reporting to the National DTO database. They commended the NW HIDTA for including a verification of DTOs reported in the annual NW HIDTA self review. I wish to thank the Task Force Commanders for taking the time to meet with the reviewers and for the excellent job that they did.

On December 16<sup>th</sup> the NW HIDTA Survey was sent out electronically to all Drug Task Forces and HIDTA participating agencies. The survey among other things collects information on the DTOs being investigated as well as current patterns and trends in drug trafficking. The survey responses are due by January 20<sup>th</sup>. This information is used to assemble our annual report and threat assessment.

Finally I wish to thank DEA for the recognition of the employees working at the NW HIDTA Intelligence Support Center (ISC) at their awards ceremony on December 14<sup>th</sup>. The ISC was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation for outstanding contributions and exemplary performance in support of drug law enforcement. We could not have asked to end the year on a better note.

## Enforcement Highlights

Not all contraband crossing the border is being smuggled into the United States. Cocaine, cash, and weapons are often seized during smuggling attempts into Canada. For example, on October 23, 2005, during outbound inspection operations at the Lynden Washington port of entry 83.6 KG of cocaine (Photo 4) were seized from a van bearing BC plates. Officers discovered the cocaine hidden within the interior panels of the vehicle.

Photo 4



Increased border enhancements have been effective in increasing drug seizures being smuggled into and out of the United States. However, enforcement efforts have also shifted smuggling operations to other areas of the border that have fewer dedicated resources, and also include maritime and aerial methods.

During 2005 the NW HIDTA began its participation in the National Marijuana Initiative (NMI), an initiative directed at

the seven states in the nation with the largest problems with large scale marijuana grow operations. The Washington State Patrol coordinates the HIDTA funding to local, county and state law enforcement agencies in order to further the investigations of other agencies as well as providing supplemental investigative support. The NW HIDTA Investigative Support Center has been providing tactical analytical support to the state of Washington segment of the initiative. The multi-jurisdictional investigative and analytical efforts in Washington, California and Oregon are coordinated through the Central Valley, California HIDTA. The primary objective of the initiative is to dismantle the operations of large scale marijuana producing Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO's) and their associates through coordinated investigations and intelligence support.

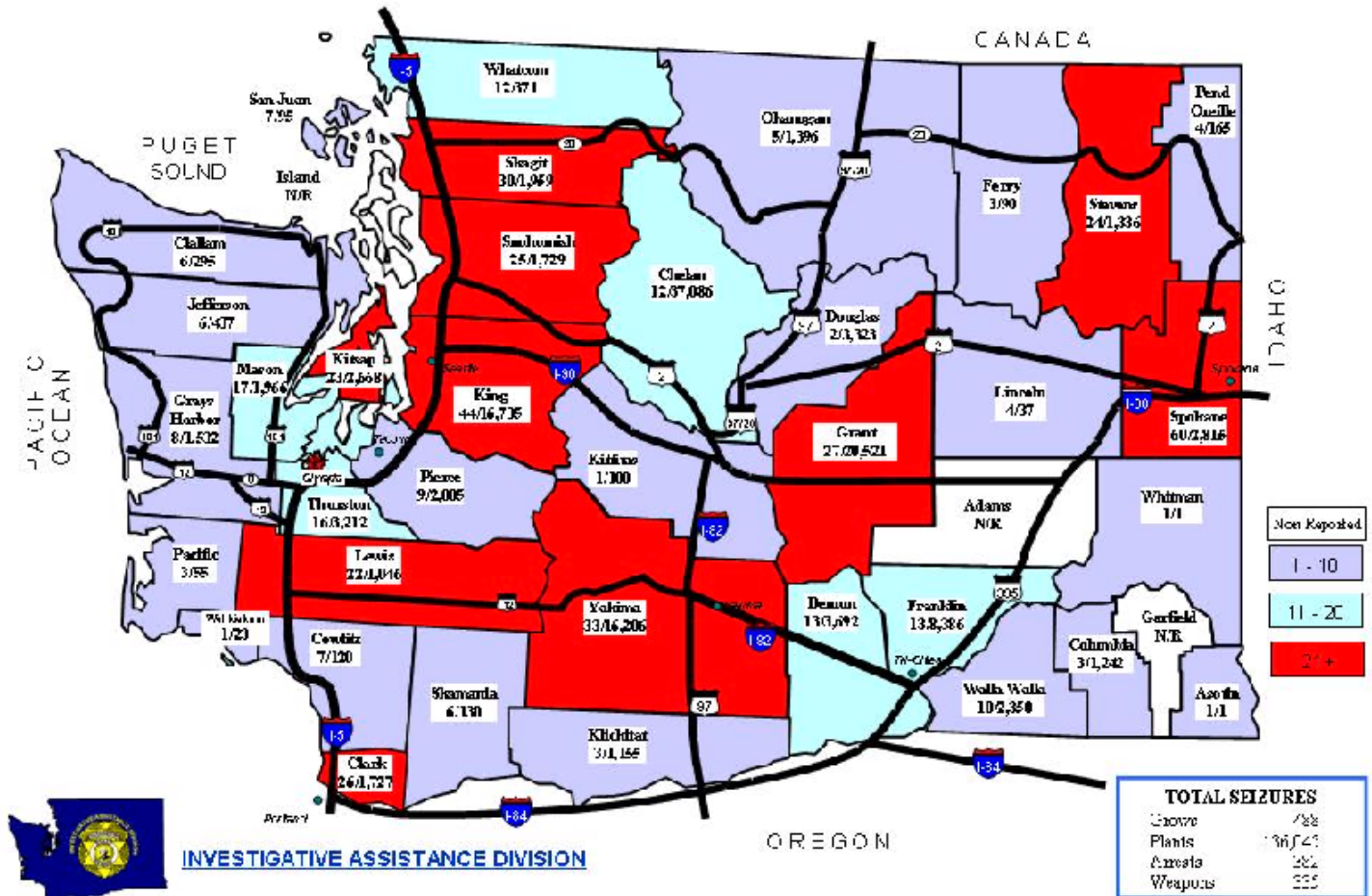
The data that has been analyzed indicates that most of the larger scale operations are operated by and involve Mexican Nationals. Most of the larger grow operations in the state of Washington are outdoor grows and these large outdoor

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2005

## WASHINGTON STATE MARIJUANA CULTIVATION SEIZURE REPORT

Reported on WSN Marijuana Cultivation Seizure Report to NW HIDTA as of 1/28/2006



The map above gives a further break down of marijuana seizure and eradication efforts (both outdoor and indoor).

### Enforcement Highlights

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marijuana grows are primarily concealed on isolated and forested public or privately held lands.

The analysis to date has further shown that the manner in which these DTO's conduct business is very similar. In most cases, investigators have found that suspects are using sophisticated irrigating systems, consisting of rubber piping used to transport water from natural sources such as nearby streams. Each plant has its own individual drip line and the piping links several grow plots together. Growers haul in fertilizer, pesticides, and wrap mesh netting around the perimeter to protect their crops. Living quarters and food provisions are found inside the grow area indicating that the tenders are living at the grow sites until harvest time. These organizations are increasing their counter surveillance efforts and in many cases are armed and dangerous.

Through November 2005, Chelan County has the highest plant count with 37,026 plants eradicated. Three other counties on the east side of the Cascades (Grant, Yakima and Franklin) have the next highest eradications, but a recently discovered large scale marijuana grow operation in Grays Harbor County is an indication that not all the significant activity takes place on the east side of the mountains.

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## Enforcement Highlights

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On September 12, 2005, the DEA Tacoma Drug Task Force executed a search warrant at a residence in Seattle, WA. A Mexican National and a Vietnamese National were arrested after two kilos of cocaine and one pound of 'crack' cocaine were discovered inside the residence. On September 21, 2005, the DEA Tacoma Drug Task Force also arrested five Mexican Nationals in Port Ludlow, WA after they delivered five pounds of crystal methamphetamine (95% pure) to a confidential source for \$52,500. Three of the five defendants were armed with handguns.

On October 4, 2005, the Washington State Patrol interdicted 41 kilos of cocaine on I-5 from a suspect who was apparently moving the drug to the Sandy Point Marina in Bellingham, WA where there was a boat waiting to move the drug into Canada. The drug was wrapped in black plastic and emitted the smell of laundry soap.

Also in October of 2005, the Thurston County and Grays Harbor Narcotics Task Forces made three arrests and seized over 2,000 marijuana plants from a large-scale marijuana grow operation in the Capitol Forest near Rock Candy Mountain. The operation was sophisticated and being managed by suspects with connections to other drug trafficking organizations in California. The crop would have yielded 300 lb of marijuana with a value of \$300,000. In the same month, the Thurston County Drug Task Force was also involved in the seizure of 90 lb of psilocybin mushrooms valued at about \$45,000 during a raid on a three story home and barn on a rural business selling herbs and flowers.

The HIDTA Integrated Drug Task Force led by DEA and staffed by Seattle PD, the King County SO, the state of Washington Dept. of Corrections and ATF, arrested 21 suspects and seized nearly two dozen weapons on November 17, 2005, in an investigation of a local Crips street gang. Agents seized \$250,000 in cash, 2 kilograms of cocaine base and powder as well vehicles and property derived from the drug trade of the gang. The targets of the investigation set up a car lot in Des Moines to launder their drug money and they used intimidation and violence to protect their DTO.

On November 18, 2005, ten suspects were arrested in a multi-state drug trafficking organization that sold cocaine and methamphetamine in Alaska. Members of the DTO bought most of their supply from sources around Los Angeles and then smuggled it to Alaska through the state of Washington using a variety of means, including FedEx and United Parcel Service packages. The operation was suspected of putting one to two kilos of methamphetamine or cocaine on the streets of Anchorage, Alaska weekly for the last two and one half years. Some of the suspects had

weapons when arrested. Multiple agencies, including DEA, FBI, ATF, IRS, U.S. Marshals, ICE, Alaska State Troopers, and the Anchorage Police assisted in this investigation.



## ISC Roster

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