

# Northwest HIDTA

Specially prepared for the ONDCP High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program



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



## Enforcement Highlights

### Major Drug Rings Dismantled

During May and June 2006, four OCDETF operations, named Snow Dog, Garage Sale, Dry Ice and Tonight show, resulted in over 100 arrests of members from several drug trafficking organizations suspected of smuggling heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine from Mexico into the state of Washington. Approximately two-thirds of the suspects were Mexican nationals illegally in the United States. During the raids at least 37 children ranging in age of 11 months to 16 years old were found living in the homes and many had to be placed by Child Protective Services. The Snow Dog and Garage Sale OCDETF operations were led by the DEA Tacoma Drug Task Force. The Transportation Group of the DEA-led HIDTA Drug Task Force and Seattle PD was primarily responsible for coordinating Dry Ice, and DEA teamed with the South Snohomish County Drug Task Force to coordinate the investigation pertaining to the Tonight Show OCDETF and another separate drug investigation that linked to Tonight Show. All the operations involved numerous local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies in several HIDTA counties.

Snow Dog, named due to the large quantities of cocaine involved, was the first operation to be taken down and resulted in 3 arrests, and the seizure of 26 kilos of cocaine, 3 lbs. of meth and \$500,000 in cash.

The second OCDETF taken down was Garage Sale and resulted in the arrest of 22 people in Tacoma and the seizure of 5 lbs. of methamphetamine, 5 lbs. of heroin, 6 kilos of cocaine, seven guns, eight cars, and \$200,000 in cash. Some of the seized cars had special hidden compartments for transporting drugs.

A federal Grand Jury in Seattle indicted 20 individuals in connection with Dry Ice, the third OCDETF, and 52 other people were also arrested on federal, state, or immigration charges. The defendants in this case were recorded making frequent calls to the leaders of the organization to obtain heroin, much of which was dealt on the streets of Seattle. DEA Special Agent in Charge Rodney Benson said the operation resulted in the dismantlement of the organizations "leadership, financiers, transporters and distribution cells operating in and around the Puget Sound region." More than 4 lbs. of heroin, 6 kilos of cocaine, 2 lbs., of meth, 8 weapons and \$300,000 in cash were seized.

The last OCDETF Operation during this period that was taken down was Tonight Show. On June 21, 2006, DEA and the South Snohomish County Narcotics Task Force coordinated arrest and search warrants in North King County, South Snohomish County, Skagit County and Gresham, Oregon. A total of 39 homes and vehicles were searched and 24 (19 federal and 5 state) arrest warrants were executed. The drug traffickers in this organization were the subject of a lengthy investigation that included a court authorized wiretap where the dealers and customers spoke in codes. A total of 10 lbs. of heroin, 6 kilos of cocaine, 200 grams of meth, 14 vehicles, and \$600,000 in cash were seized. The photo above depicts some of the seized "money" in the "laundry" of one of the homes. In the Tonight Show case and the linked investigation, wire transactions were identified that involved numerous individuals sending money back to Mexico.



US Currency found in the laundry



Load of BC Bud

On June 29, 2006, the results of Operation Frozen Timber were announced. This operation revealed the large-scale smuggling of B.C. Bud into Washington State using aircraft. During the operation, 4 tons of marijuana, 800 lbs. of cocaine, and 1.5 million in cash were seized. There were at least 46 arrests. ICE Special Agent in Charge, Leigh Winchell, said "first they tried to go through us, then they tried to go around us, then they tried to go under us, now they try going over us." ICE agents working with Canadian law enforcement video taped many of the drops in the forested public and private lands along the border between the state of Washington and Canada (see above).

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## Director's Message

On March 22, 2006 Congressman Dave Reichert sponsored a Roundtable discussion in the city of Kent with various community, law enforcement, and state officials concerning methamphetamine. The guest speaker for this event was John Walters, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). This was followed by a visit to the Pediatric Interim Care Center (PICC), which takes care of infants that have been born addicted to drugs.

In early April the award letters for funding the 2006 NW HIDTA Initiatives were sent to all the HIDTA grant fiduciaries. If you have any question about this please contact Charlotte Biggs at (206) 352-3604.

The Governor's Methamphetamine Coordinating Committee (GMCC) met on May 12, 2006 in Olympia and was provided briefings on the latest drug trafficking trends and best practices and data in the implementation of prevention and treatment programs in the state. An audit report of the Washington State Methamphetamine Initiative was also provided as well as reports on the Meth Action Teams and the formation of DEC Alliance in our state. It was also agreed that the GMCC would become a subcommittee of the Governor's Council on Substance Abuse.

On May 17 and 18, 2006 the National Methamphetamine Chemical Initiative (NMCI) held its annual meeting in Dallas, Texas. It was the best attended conference by far. There was also a good size contingent from Washington State law enforcement. The major attraction was the panel consisting of US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, Mexico Attorney General Daniel Cabeza de Vaca, ONDCP Director John Walters, DEA Administrator Karen Tandy and ICE Assistant Secretary Julie Myers. It was felt it was in the interest of both countries that delegates from Mexico be invited to the conference because of the changing trends where methamphetamine production and the availability of precursors have grown tremendously in Mexico and its serious impact to both societies.

Finally I would like to thank everyone who contributed in the process of assembling the Northwest HIDTA Threat Assessment, Strategy, Initiatives and Budget for 2007. These documents were approved by the Executive Board and forwarded to ONDCP.



## National Marijuana Initiative

There have been many successes achieved this past year; however, marijuana cultivation continues to increase on a yearly basis and is spreading to new areas within our state. Mexican national DTOs are at the center and will continue to do whatever they feel is necessary to further their production and distribution of marijuana.

During 2005, Washington State succeeded in opening up better lines of communication between Federal, State, and local agencies, task forces, analysts, investigators and other states where we have cross-over investigations occurring. This was made possible largely due to the participation in the National Marijuana Initiative (NMI).

Through consistent communication between the Northwest HIDTA analyst and Oregon analysts assigned to the NMI, links between a marijuana and methamphetamine DTO that has been operating within Washington State to at least two, possibly three, counties in Oregon were positively confirmed. Communication with additional NMI contacts in California has led to case connections between Eastern Washington, Oregon and Northern California counties in a historical case, which was initiated out of California.

The Northwest HIDTA ISC currently has four open cases that were initiated as a result of outdoor marijuana grows located during the 2005 season. Three of these cases are joint investigations involving Chelan County Sheriff's Office, Columbia River Drug Task Force, DEA, FBI, and WSP. The fourth case is a multi-jurisdictional investigation, which crosses state lines into Oregon and involves narcotic task forces along the Olympic Peninsula.

Through eradication efforts several subjects of interest were identified and several links were made between Washington, Oregon and California, which led to investigations being initiated on those targets.

In 2005, it was the first year that Washington has aggressively targeted this type of organization. The driving force behind the NMI is to promote local, state and federal law enforcement entities to work together and conduct Intelligence based investigations rather than focusing solely on eradication. To counteract the effects of these large-scale operations within our state; law enforcement has made a commitment to focus their efforts on intelligence driven investigations and work together to detect, disrupt and dismantle these drug trafficking organizations.

## Washington State Patrol SHCAT

Over the past several years, the Washington State Patrol (WSP) has developed a program for deploying canine troopers and line troopers in tandem to focus on serious highway crimes.

These teams are called “Serious Highway Crime Apprehension Teams,” or SHCAT. The SHCAT Teams have proven highly successful in apprehending DUP’s and aggressive drivers, and in detecting non-driving crimes, such as narcotics trafficking and possession, weapons violations, ID theft, and much more. The teams also help gather and forward valuable street crime related intelligence to task forces and other investigators.



Who are these SHCAT troopers? These troopers are uniformed troopers working in marked patrol vehicles just like the troopers you see daily on the highways of Washington State. In fact the only difference between SHCAT troopers and regular line troopers is the level of training given to SHCAT members, specialized equipment, and SHCAT members are not responsible for responding to calls for service. SHCAT troopers are highly trained and motivated to detect and apprehend subjects committing serious crimes while traveling on our state and interstate highways.

How do SHCAT troopers interdict serious crimes? They focus their enforcement efforts on all traffic violations and behaviors considered “core” to the Field Operations Bureau’s (FOB) mission just like any other trooper working in a traffic line function. Because SHCAT troopers are free from calls for service and they make high volume legal traffic stops and they have enhanced training and experience, they are able to detect individuals involved in criminal activity. It has been said, “the traffic stop gets you to the cars window; good police work leads to the arrest!”

The role of SHCAT is a challenging and ever changing one that is continuously affected by court decisions and new laws and requires professional, vigilant and knowledgeable personnel. The Washington State Patrol command staff recognizes this and recently created a full time SHCAT trainer and statewide coordinator to provide training to all levels of WSP personnel including command staff and also help support the needs of SHCAT teams throughout the state.



The Washington State Patrol SHCAT program and Northwest HIDTA have enjoyed a great relationship over the past years. Northwest HIDTA has played an important role in the success of both the WSP K9 unit and the SHCAT program by providing funding for SHCAT troopers to conduct traffic safety emphasis such as “Operation Rest Stop” and “Apple Blossom.” The Northwest HIDTA funding and partnership has served the members of SHCAT with outstanding training opportunities in which they would have never been able to get.

The team members share a close bond with each other even though they are spread across the state. Because of the nature of the subjects they are interdicting and the violent crimes these subjects are involved in, SHCAT teams closely monitor and stay informed in what other teams are finding and share intelligence with each other, in order to help interdict criminals and keep each other safe.

## 2006 Scheduled Training Classes

| <u>Date</u>           | <u>Course</u>                       | <u>Location/Provider</u> |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| August 14-16, 2006    | Introduction to Intelligence for LE | Cowlitz CO / MCTC        |
| September 13-15, 2006 | Video Techniques for LE             | Richland PD/MCTC         |

## Prevention/Treatment Initiative Drug Courts

As this edition of the Northwest HIDTA Newsletter goes to press, the City of Seattle is playing host to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) 12th Annual Drug Court Training Conference, June 21-24 at the Washington State Convention and Trade Center. This is an auspicious event for the Drug Court community in Washington State and we are honored to have been selected.

The concept on which the Drug Court model is based was developed and implemented in Dade County, Florida in 1989. Since that time, over 1,800 Drug Courts have been established across the country, with each state and several U.S. territories represented. In addition, the model has been adopted internationally, with programs operating in Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Austria, and several other countries. The concept is in fact considered to be such an important and effective innovation within the criminal justice system that several U.S. District Courts including the Oregon District, have developed "Federal Drug Courts," contributing to the advancement of drug court principles in the U.S. Court system.

Within Washington State, 18 counties (including each of the Northwest HIDTA counties) have implemented Drug Court programs within their Superior Court systems. Further, the success of these programs has prompted the development of Juvenile Drug Courts in nine counties and Family Treatment Courts in five counties as well as DUI Courts, Mental Health Courts, and Misdemeanor Drug Courts. Together, these programs served over 3,000 offenders in 2005.

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## Bulk Purchases of Pre-Paid Cell Phones

Prepaid cell phones are one of the most intriguing recent developments in wireless service. They can be purchased for as little as \$19.99 at many popular retail stores, such as Wal-Mart, Best Buy, and Kmart. Along with the phone, the consumer purchases a specified amount of air time, much like purchasing a long-distance phone card. By purchasing a prepaid cell phone, the customer avoids a contract for a monthly service plan and does not have to provide identification or use a credit card.

Prepaid cell phones have many legitimate uses and are popular with individuals with bad credit or those who want a phone for emergency situations but do not want to pay for a monthly service. But since these phones can be difficult or impossible to track, they have become a popular resource for organized crime gangs, drug traffickers, and terrorists.

Recently law enforcement officials noticed a trend in which large amounts of prepaid cell phones are being purchased by individuals who emanate from the Middle East and Pakistan. Bulk purchases of disposable phones came to the public's attention following recent indictments in Texas and California where Middle Eastern males attempted to purchase unusually large quantities of prepaid cell phones at Wal-Mart stores. The FBI was notified by store employees and investigated in both cases. Other states, including Pennsylvania, have also reported such incidents. Concern over the bulk purchases of cell phones by Middle Easterners can be linked to reports of terrorist cells using prepaid cell phones. The terrorists in Madrid, for example, used prepaid phones to detonate bombs in the trains that killed 191 people.

Security personnel from a prepaid cellular company report another possible reason for the bulk purchases, the burgeoning market in the sale of "unlocked" cell phones. Prepaid cell phones are sold "locked," so they can only function on one network. A simple modification to the phone, called "flashing," can be performed, which unlocks the phone and allows it to be used on other networks. Flashing is done by entering a code via the touchpad or connecting the phone to a device that will unlock it. An unlocked phone can accept any Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card regardless of the carrier. The unlocked phone can then be sold for profit. Although the activity itself is not considered illegal, the quick, significant, and undocumented revenue from this activity may be used to finance criminal or terrorist activity.

TracFone Wireless reports between September 2004 and December 2005, when three or more of their prepaid cell phones were purchased at one time, 90 percent of those phones were never activated on their network. They also report a nationwide pattern of bulk purchases at their major retailers. The majority of these transactions are made by customers of Middle Eastern origin.

Bulk purchases of prepaid cell phones appear to be a growing nationwide trend and have been reported in several locations in Pennsylvania. The documented use of disposable cell phones by terrorists and the recent bulk purchases by suspicious individuals warrants concern that these phones are being used by terrorist cells operating in the United States.

# Enforcement Highlights

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On May 18, 2006, the DEA Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) and the Seattle Police announced the results of an eight-month collaborative effort in a crack down of open-air drug markets in the downtown Seattle and Capitol Hill neighborhoods. Seattle Police detectives of the Narcotics Unit and the Anti-Crime Teams and federal law enforcement agents assigned to the MET arrested 403 suspects and 14 juveniles. They confiscated 1,729 grams of cocaine with a street value of \$172,900 and 1,596 grams of heroin with a street value of \$239,000. A total of \$65,000 in cash was also recovered. They further seized 14 firearms and 21 vehicles during the operation. The deployment resulted in the largest number of drug arrests of any MET deployment in the program's history.

On April 12th, 2006, the Pierce County Sheriff's Special Investigations Unit, Washington State Patrol and members of ICE concluded a joint investigation with the arrest of 8 individuals involved in the delivery of crystal meth. The arrests took place in the Fife and Roy areas and with the service of a search warrant. The individuals arrested were determined to be illegal aliens and had detainers placed on them by the ICE members that participated in the service of the search warrant and other related arrests. Approximately 3 lbs. of crystal meth and 4 lbs. of marijuana were seized along with \$14,000 and several weapons.

In March 2006, the Snohomish Regional Drug Task Force and the Drug Enforcement Administration completed a 1½ year OCDETF investigation titled "Lame Duck" involving the smuggling and distribution of marijuana from both Canada and Mexico. A total of 11 arrests were made with 6 being prosecuted federally and 15 prosecuted at the state level. Approximately 285 lbs.

of processed marijuana was seized as well as 161 marijuana plants. A total of 22 properties valued at approximately \$3,523,600, plus \$335,853 in cash and over \$100,000 in other assets were seized. During the investigation, the suspects rented a house in January 2005 that was owned by the task force and paid the law enforcement agency \$1,200 a month for rent.

In May 2006, the Snohomish Regional Drug Task Force organized a highway interdiction operation in the counties of Snohomish, Skagit, Whatcom, Island and San Juan to interdict smugglers along the I-5 corridor. They were joined in the operation by police departments and ICE in the operation that led to 187 arrests. Police stopped 1,138 vehicles and discovered 1½ lbs. of marijuana, nearly 1/2 lb. of cocaine, 1 ounce of meth, 60 Ecstasy tablets, 80 prescription pills, and \$12,500 in cash. This operation followed several seizures of larger quantities of drugs along the I-5 corridor including the discovery of a trailer filled with a ton of marijuana valued at \$5.5 million in April 2006 in Stanwood, WA.



Hidden Compartment

On November 2, 2005, an interdiction stop was made in Snohomish County on a 2004 Chevrolet one-ton diesel pickup displaying British Columbia license plates. A drug-detecting canine gave positive indications for the presence of controlled substance odors. A search warrant was served on the vehicle and a hidden compartment was found underneath the bed of the truck. As shown in the photo above, the rear rocker panel of the truck had been extended approximately 2½ inches lower than stock and the hidden compartment covered the entire length of the bed. A search of the hidden compartment revealed \$699,900 in cash in vacuum-sealed food storage bags.

## Drug Courts, *Continued from page 4...*

The NADCP has chosen Seattle as the site of this year's Annual Conference as the "Pacific Northwest region and Washington State in particular has made its mark on the drug court field since its inception . . . the State of Washington boasts some of our foremost leaders and innovators in the drug court movement . . . (and) our visit in 2006 recognizes this region's role in the development of the drug court field."

At least 3,000 attendees from around the world are expected at this year's conference, structured to include 22 Training Tracks, 16 Pre-conference Workshops, and 5 Plenary Sessions. Local professionals will be prominently represented among the presenters and speakers, with the agenda addressing many topics of immediate concern such as methamphetamine, drug endangered children, Native traditions, and trauma and post-traumatic stress disorders.

*For further information regarding the Northwest HIDTA Prevention/Treatment Initiative, please contact Steve Freng at 206.352.3603 or [sfreg@nw.hidta.org](mailto:sfreg@nw.hidta.org). The Northwest HIDTA also participates in the Washington State Association of Drug Court Professionals; for information regarding this state's affiliate of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, please contact the Pierce County Alliance at (253) 572-4750.*

# Surveillance Equipment to Assist Law Enforcement Agencies

Northwest HIDTA maintains a pool of specialized surveillance equipment to assist law enforcement agencies and HIDTA task forces in investigations.

The equipment is loaned at no charge for a period of 30 days, which may be extended if necessary.

Requests for equipment and support may be submitted to Gary Fiber by telephone at (206) 352-3637 or via email at [gfiber@nw.hidta.org](mailto:gfiber@nw.hidta.org).

The borrowing agency agrees to use the equipment only in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Northwest HIDTA can under certain circumstances perform "on site" field installations of surveillance equipment. Each request is handled on a case-by-case basis.

Northwest HIDTA is available to duplicate audio cassette and VHS video tape recordings. Technical training and advice for surveillance equipment purchase and use is also available.

The following is a brief listing of some of the equipment available from Northwest HIDTA:

- MiniDV Camcorder
- Digital camera SLR
- 35 mm film SLR
- Hi-8 video recorders
- VHS video recorders, normal and time lapse
- Low light video camera
- Microwave Video Transformer Pole Cams
- Microwave Video NMEA electrical box cams (Photos 1&2)
- Tactical voice repeaters
- Body wires
- Body wire recording receivers (Photo 3)
- Fiber optic scope
- RF beacon and Radio direction finder
- Digital pager intercept
- Cell phone intercept
- Night vision scopes
- Night vision goggles (Photo 4)
- Video camera night vision intensifiers
- GPS Trackers – 2 - real time / 4 - data logger types
- Video pinhole camera
- Audio pinhole device
- Digital pager intercept equipment
- Telephone trap and trace equipment
- Shirt button video camera and audio recorder (Photo 5)



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