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# Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands

## Drug Threat Assessment



National Drug Intelligence Center  
U.S. Department of Justice



# **Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Drug Threat Assessment**

*National Drug Intelligence Center  
319 Washington Street, 5th Floor  
Johnstown, PA 15901-1622  
(814) 532-4601*

## Preface

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This report is a strategic assessment that addresses the status and outlook of the drug threat to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Analytical judgment determined the threat posed by each drug type or category, taking into account the most current quantitative and qualitative information on availability, demand, production or cultivation, transportation, and distribution, as well as the effects of a particular drug on abusers and society as a whole. While NDIC sought to incorporate the latest available information, a time lag often exists between collection and publication of data, particularly demand-related data sets. NDIC anticipates that this drug threat assessment will be useful to policymakers, law enforcement personnel, and treatment providers at the federal, state, and local levels because it draws upon a broad range of information sources to describe and analyze the drug threat to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

# Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Drug Threat Assessment

## Executive Summary

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The distribution and abuse as well as the transshipment of illicit drugs pose serious threats to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are major transshipment points for cocaine destined for the continental United States. Puerto Rico also serves as a major transshipment site for South American heroin smuggled to the continental United States.

**Cocaine** poses a significant drug threat to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The drug is readily available and commonly abused, and its distribution and abuse often are associated with violent crime. According to law enforcement and health officials, powdered and crack cocaine commonly are abused in Puerto Rico, while crack cocaine abuse is more prevalent than powdered cocaine abuse in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands frequently are used as cocaine transshipment locations; most of the cocaine smuggled to the islands from South America is transshipped to other markets, primarily in the U.S. mainland. Cocaine is transported into and through Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands primarily by maritime vessels and also by aircraft. Dominican drug trafficking organizations and criminal groups are the primary transporters of cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; however, Colombian drug trafficking organizations and Puerto Rican criminal groups also transport cocaine into and through the islands. Colombian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican criminal groups are the principal wholesale-level distributors of cocaine in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These criminal groups supply the drug principally to other Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers and USVI criminal groups for retail sale.

**Heroin** poses a significant drug threat to Puerto Rico, although it poses only a minor threat to the U.S. Virgin Islands. Heroin abuse is a significant problem in Puerto Rico and is largely fueled by the availability of high purity South American heroin. According to local law enforcement authorities, very small quantities of Southeast Asian, Mexican black tar, and Mexican brown powdered heroin occasionally are available. Puerto Rico serves as a significant transshipment location for South American heroin smuggled to the continental United States. Heroin is transported into and through Puerto Rico primarily

by air and maritime conveyances. Colombian and Dominican drug trafficking organizations and criminal groups are the primary transporters of heroin into and through Puerto Rico; however, Puerto Rican criminal groups also transport heroin into and through the commonwealth. Colombian and, to a lesser extent, Dominican and Puerto Rican criminal groups are the principal distributors of wholesale quantities of heroin in Puerto Rico. These criminal groups supply the drug principally to other Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers for retail sale. Heroin distribution in the U.S. Virgin Islands is very limited, and there is virtually no wholesale distribution of the drug. In the U.S. Virgin Islands retail-level heroin distribution is confined to a small Hispanic community in St. Croix.

**Marijuana** is one of the most widely available and commonly abused illicit drugs in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Most of the marijuana available in Puerto Rico is produced in Mexico; however, locally produced marijuana as well as marijuana produced in Colombia and Jamaica also is available. Most marijuana available in the U.S. Virgin Islands is smuggled from southern island locations such as St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines; however, its origin is unknown. Cannabis cultivation in Puerto Rico is limited. Most of the cannabis grown in Puerto Rico is cultivated in small plots in the central mountain area and in the Rio Grande region of northeast Puerto Rico. Cannabis produced locally in the U.S. Virgin Islands usually is cultivated outdoors; however, poor terrain and arid climate across the U.S. Virgin Islands produce a low-quality product. Puerto Rican criminal groups primarily use couriers aboard commercial aircraft and package delivery services to transport Mexico-produced marijuana into Puerto Rico. Colombian drug trafficking organizations often use the transportation services of Dominican drug trafficking organizations and criminal groups to smuggle Colombian marijuana to Puerto Rico by maritime conveyances. Marijuana primarily is transported to the U.S. Virgin Islands in small maritime vessels. Puerto Rican criminal groups and local independent dealers are the principal distributors of wholesale and retail quantities of marijuana in Puerto Rico. In the U.S. Virgin Islands local criminal groups and independent dealers are the primary wholesale and retail distributors of marijuana.

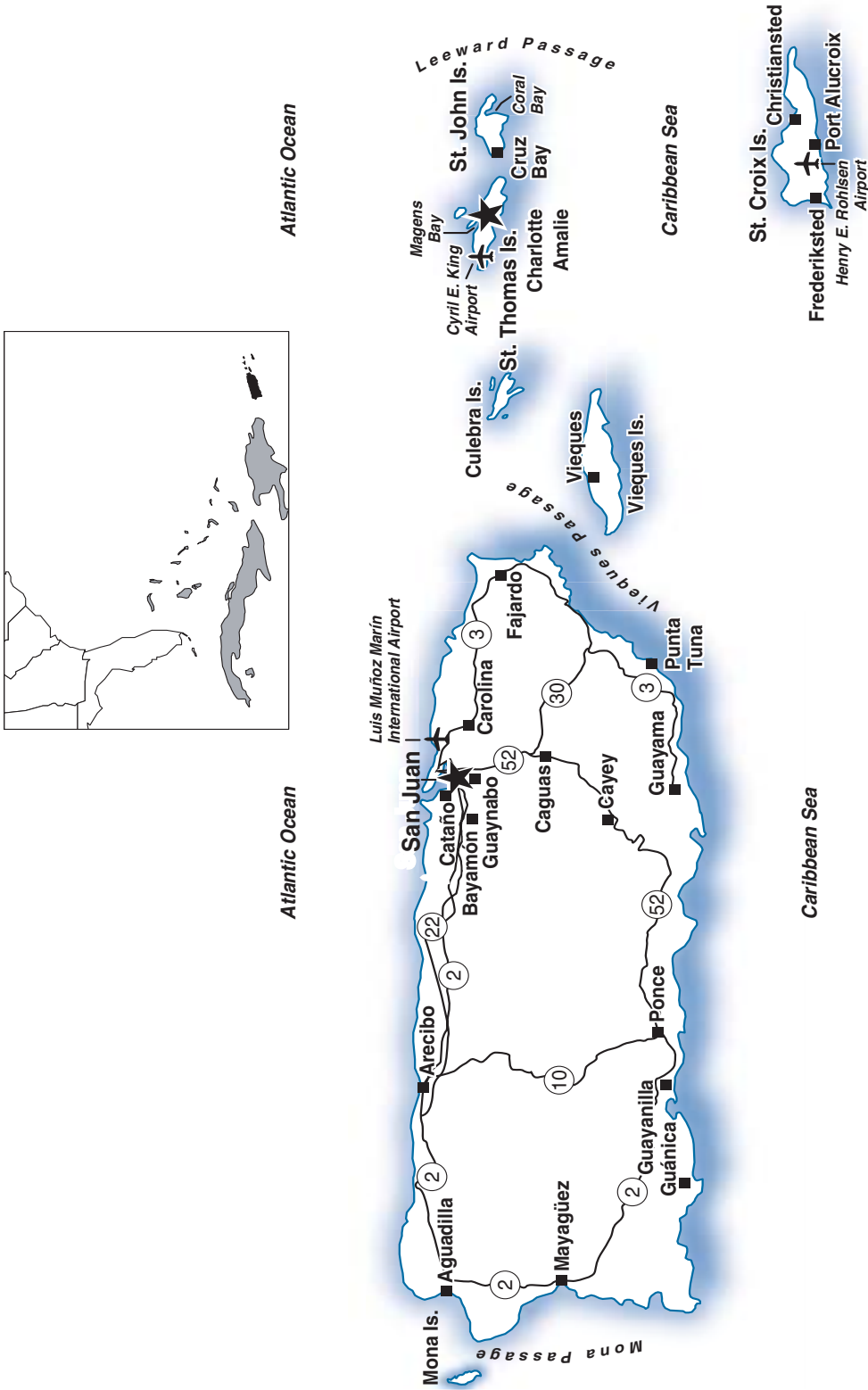
**Other dangerous drugs** pose a low threat to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Other dangerous drugs abused in Puerto Rico include the stimulant MDMA and diverted pharmaceuticals, including meperidines such as Demerol; oxycodones such as Percocet; hydromorphones such as Dilaudid; and benzodiazepines such as Valium and Xanax. MDMA commonly is abused at bars and nightclubs in San Juan. Young individuals, primarily upper-middle-class youth, are the primary abusers of MDMA in Puerto Rico. Dominican and Puerto Rican criminal groups recruit some of these young individuals as couriers to transport MDMA from Europe to Puerto Rico via the Dominican Republic aboard commercial aircraft. Young Puerto Rican men are the primary retail distributors of MDMA. There is little wholesale distribution of MDMA in Puerto Rico. The diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs pose minor but continuing threats to Puerto Rico. In the U.S. Virgin Islands the distribution and abuse of MDMA, as well as the diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs, are limited.

There are no reports of **methamphetamine** production, availability, or abuse in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Note: This map displays features mentioned in the report.



# Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands Drug Threat Assessment

## Overview

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) are located in the Caribbean Sea over 1,100 miles southeast of Florida. Puerto Rico is composed of the main island—measuring 110 miles by 35 miles—two populated islands, Culebra and Vieques, and other unpopulated islands. The USVI, located 45 miles east of Puerto Rico, consists of three islands: St. Thomas (where the capital city, Charlotte Amalie, is located), St. Croix, and St. John. Residents born in Puerto Rico and the USVI are U.S. citizens. The USVI is home to more than 120,000 people. Puerto Rico is larger and more populous, with more than 3.9 million residents. Puerto Rico's population is concentrated in the capital of San Juan and the surrounding cities of Bayamón, Carolina, Cataño, and Guaynabo.

Puerto Rico and the USVI are transshipment points for illicit drugs that are smuggled from source countries into the U.S. mainland as well as destination points for drugs distributed within the territories. Puerto Rico and the USVI are situated between the U.S. mainland and drug source countries such as Colombia and Peru, making them ideal gateways for the movement of illicit drugs onward to the U.S. mainland. Drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and criminal groups use commercial and private maritime

Fast Facts	
Puerto Rico	
Population (July 2002, estimated)	3,957,988
Median household income (2001)	\$9,988
Unemployment rate (December 2001)	11.1%
Land area	3,427 square miles
Capital	San Juan
Other principal cities	Arecibo, Bayamón, Caguas, Carolina, Cataño, Guaynabo, Mayagüez, Ponce
Municipalities	78
Principal industries	Food products (dairy), manufacturing (chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles), technology, tourism

vessels, commercial and private aircraft, and package delivery services to smuggle illicit drugs into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI.

Large drug shipments often are offloaded in Puerto Rico and the USVI, repackaged, and



<b>Fast Facts</b>	
<b>U.S. Virgin Islands</b>	
<b>Population (July 2002, estimated)</b>	123,498
<b>Median household income (2000)</b>	NA
<b>Unemployment rate (March 1999)</b>	4.9%
<b>Land area</b>	352 square miles
<b>Capital</b>	Charlotte Amalie
<b>Other principal cities</b>	Christiansted, Cruz Bay, Fredriksted
<b>Principal industries</b>	Electronics, petroleum refining, pharmaceuticals, textiles, technology, tourism

stored in secluded areas until they are distributed locally or transported to the U.S. mainland.

Puerto Rico and the USVI contain 11 seaports; the largest is the Port of San Juan. This port is the fourth busiest container port in the Western Hemisphere, handling more than 2 million containers annually. Other important seaports in Puerto Rico are located in Aguadilla, Fajardo, Guanica, Guayanilla, Guayama, and Ponce. The ports in Puerto Rico handled more than 27.6 million tons of domestic and foreign cargo in 2000. Approximately two-thirds of the commercial cargo entering Puerto Rico originates in countries located in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Major seaports in the USVI are located in Charlotte Amalie, Christiansted, Cruz Bay, and Port Alucroix. The ports in the USVI handled more than 45.7 million tons of domestic and foreign cargo in 2000.

DTOs and criminal groups often smuggle large drug shipments from source and transshipment countries into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI via commercial maritime conveyances. Containerized cargo ships, large freighters, bulk cargo ships, and commercial fishing vessels often are used to transport drug shipments directly from

source countries or from transshipment countries in the Caribbean to Puerto Rico and the USVI. Drugs transported on these vessels commonly are concealed in false compartments and vessel components including fuel tanks, or they are concealed inside shipping containers among licit goods or in the walls of the container itself. These large vessels also frequently act as “motherships” in the open ocean where crew members offload drug shipments onto smaller vessels.

Private maritime conveyances also are used to transport drug shipments from source and transshipment countries into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. Go-fast boats frequently are used to transport drug shipments from drug source countries and various Caribbean islands to shore points throughout Puerto Rico and the USVI, often traveling at night to avoid detection. These vessels also are used to retrieve drug shipments from large motherships in the open sea or from small private aircraft that drop bales of drugs into the water. Private yachts and fishing vessels are used in this same manner, though to a lesser extent.

Drug transporters exploit the cruise ship industry to transport drugs into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. More than 1.3 million cruise ship passengers visited Puerto Rico in 2000, with most—1.2 million—arriving in San Juan. Over 1.7 million cruise ship passengers visited the USVI in 2000. Law enforcement officials report that couriers—which include passengers and crew members—conceal drugs internally, on their persons, and in their luggage among personal belongings when transporting drugs aboard cruise ships. Couriers aboard passenger ferries also transport illicit drugs into Puerto Rico and the USVI.

Puerto Rico has one international airport—Luis Muñoz Marín San Juan International Airport (SJU), which is the busiest in the Caribbean—while the USVI has two smaller commercial airports, Henry E. Rohlsen Airport in St. Croix and Cyril E. King International Airport in St. Thomas. There are approximately 75 daily flights from San Juan International Airport to the continental United States, and the airport also

services flights to and from Latin America and Europe. Destinations in the U.S. mainland include Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, New York, Orlando, and Philadelphia. More than 9.4 million passengers passed through San Juan International Airport in 2001. The USVI airports serve cities in the U.S. mainland with nonstop flights and provide commuter service among many Caribbean islands.

Drug transporters often smuggle drugs into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI via commercial aircraft. Millions of people travel through commercial airports in Puerto Rico and the USVI each year, providing ample opportunities to smuggle drugs. Couriers aboard commercial aircraft typically transport drugs on their persons or in their luggage, or they conceal the drugs internally. Drug transporters also use package delivery services and air cargo to smuggle drugs.

Drug transporters also use private aircraft to smuggle drugs into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. Private aircraft most frequently are used to conduct airdrops of drugs, which are then retrieved by crew members aboard maritime vessels for subsequent transportation to Puerto Rico and the USVI. Private aircraft also are used to transport drugs to airports or private airstrips in the territories, although to a much lesser extent.

Drugs often are transported within Puerto Rico and the USVI via private vehicles traveling on island roadways. In Puerto Rico Highway 2 extends west from San Juan to Aguadilla and Mayagüez on the west coast, then south and east past Guayanilla to Ponce. Highway 3 extends from Carolina eastward to Fajardo, then south along the east coast and west to Guayama. Route 22 extends east to west between San Juan and Arecibo. Motorway 52 extends south from San Juan past Caguas, then southwest to Cayey, terminating at Ponce. Highway 10 extends from Arecibo on the northern coast to Ponce in the south. There are numerous smaller roads that pass through the mountainous interior of Puerto Rico. In contrast to Puerto Rico, USVI roadways are generally small, local roads.

Several ethnic DTOs and criminal groups transport drugs throughout the Caribbean, and these groups frequently work together to facilitate their illicit activity. Generally, Dominican DTOs and criminal groups are the dominant transporters of drugs throughout the Caribbean, most often using maritime vessels. These DTOs and groups also use aircraft to smuggle drugs. These DTOs and criminal groups frequently transport drugs for Colombian DTOs and are paid with cash, drugs, or weapons. Colombian DTOs and Puerto Rican criminal groups also transport drugs into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. Dominican DTOs and criminal groups, Colombian DTOs, and Puerto Rican criminal groups transport drugs from Puerto Rico and the USVI to the U.S. mainland using maritime and air conveyances.

Various criminal groups and local independent dealers distribute illicit drugs in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Colombian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican criminal groups are the principal wholesale-level drug distributors in Puerto Rico, while retail distribution is dominated by heavily armed and violent Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers. In the USVI wholesale and retail drug distribution is conducted by native Virgin Islander, Colombian, Dominican, Puerto Rican, and Arab criminal groups and local independent dealers.

Retail-level drug sales occur at various locations in Puerto Rico and the USVI. In Puerto Rico drugs are sold at *puntos de drogas*, or drug points. These drug points are comparable to open-air drug markets on the U.S. mainland. Distributors generally sell multiple drugs at these locations. Drug points commonly are located in or near low-income public housing projects; however, some drug points are located in middle-class neighborhoods. In the USVI most drugs are sold in hand-to-hand transactions on city streets and in bars, clubs, and residences.

Drug-related violent crime is common in Puerto Rico and also occurs in the USVI. According to law enforcement officials, retail drug distributors in Puerto Rico and the USVI are

heavily armed and commit violent crimes including homicide to control lucrative drug markets. The Puerto Rico Police Department reported that 63 percent of the 744 murders on the island in 2001 were related to drug distribution activity. Further, approximately 70 to 80 percent of homicides involving firearms in Puerto Rico are attributed to disputes over drugs and turf. Drug abusers in the territories also commit violent crimes including robbery, burglary, carjacking, car theft, and home invasion to obtain money to support their drug habits.

Federal seizure statistics indicate that cocaine, heroin, and marijuana frequently are seized in and around Puerto Rico and the USVI. According to Federal-wide Drug Seizure System (FDSS) data, federal law enforcement officials seized 22,250.9 kilograms of cocaine, 306.4 kilograms of heroin, and 1,848 kilograms of marijuana in Puerto Rico from 1999 through 2002. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Caribbean Division reported seizures in the USVI from FY2000 through FY2002 totaling 3,114.2 kilograms of cocaine, 2.6 kilograms of heroin, and 494.3 kilograms of marijuana. The Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reported seizures totaling 31,180 kilograms of cocaine, 101 kilograms of heroin, and 5,047 kilograms of marijuana from fiscal year (FY) 1999 through FY2001 in Puerto Rico and the USVI. In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Greater Antilles Section reported seizing 4,673 kilograms of cocaine, 0 kilograms of heroin, and 9,657 kilograms of marijuana in FY2001. Some of the CBP and USCG seizures may be reflected in the FDSS data.

The percentage of federal sentences that were drug-related in Puerto Rico was significantly higher than the national percentage in FY2001. According to U.S. Sentencing Commission (USSC) data, 68.0 percent of federal sentences in Puerto Rico were drug-related in FY2001 compared with 41.2 percent nationwide. Of the drug-related federal sentences in Puerto Rico, 77.7 percent resulted from powdered or crack cocaine offenses compared with 42.5 percent nationwide.

The percentage of federal sentences that were drug-related in the USVI was significantly lower than the national percentage in FY2001. According to USSC data, 16.0 percent of federal sentences in the USVI were drug-related in FY2001 compared with 41.2 percent nationwide. The majority (86.6%) of drug-related federal sentences in the USVI in FY2001 resulted from powdered or crack cocaine offenses.

Most individuals treated for drug abuse in Puerto Rico are adult males. According to the Mental Health and Anti-Addiction Services Administration of Puerto Rico (MHAASA), a total of 10,835 individuals received treatment for substance abuse from 2000 to 2001, and adult males accounted for 88 percent of the total. Individuals 25 to 34 years of age accounted for more treatment admissions than any other age group. In Puerto Rico a large percentage of substance abuse treatment admissions are for alcohol abuse; however, 23.4 percent of male treatment patients were admitted for marijuana abuse, followed closely by heroin (23.0%) and cocaine (14.3%). Among females, heroin accounted for 20.0 percent of treatment admissions, followed by marijuana (16.3%) and cocaine (9.9%). Drug abuse treatment data were not available for the USVI.

### **Intelligence Gaps**

In most cases, national data sources such as the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) either do not report data for Puerto Rico and the USVI, or they provide information that is dated or limited in scope. This renders quantification of the drug threat difficult.

The financial impact on Puerto Rico's government from substance abuse-related costs is substantial. In 1998, the most recent year for which data are available, Puerto Rican officials spent nearly \$900 million on substance abuse-related programs in areas including justice, education, health, child/family assistance, mental health/

developmental disabilities, and public safety. This figure amounted to 6.2 percent of the total expenditures for the commonwealth. When factoring in the cost of lost productivity and nongovernmental expenses by private social services, estimates for total substance abuse-related costs are even higher.

Money laundering poses a serious threat to Puerto Rico and, to a lesser extent, the USVI. The threat is so high in Puerto Rico that it was designated a High Intensity Financial Crime Area (HIFCA) in 2000. The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) has reported that banks and other financial institutions in Puerto Rico filed more than 1,000 Suspicious Activity

Reports (SARs) in 2000; this was more than three times the number of SARs filed in 1999. Money launderers in Puerto Rico and the USVI launder illicit drug proceeds using various methods including structuring bank deposits and money order purchases to avoid reporting requirements; using money services businesses such as money remittance, money exchange, and check cashing firms; using casinos in Puerto Rico; and smuggling bulk currency. Money launderers make use of other techniques as well, such as commingling drug proceeds with funds generated by legitimate businesses and purchasing assets including real estate and vehicles.

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## Cocaine

Cocaine poses a significant drug threat to Puerto Rico and the USVI. The drug is readily available and commonly abused and its distribution and abuse often are associated with violent crime. According to law enforcement and health officials, powdered cocaine and crack cocaine commonly are abused in Puerto Rico, while crack cocaine abuse is more prevalent than powdered cocaine abuse in the USVI. Puerto Rico and the USVI are commonly used as cocaine transshipment locations; most of the cocaine smuggled to the islands from South America is transshipped to other markets, primarily on the U.S. mainland. Cocaine is transported into and

through Puerto Rico and the USVI primarily by maritime vessels and also by air conveyances. Dominican DTOs and criminal groups are the primary transporters of cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI; however, Colombian DTOs and Puerto Rican criminal groups also transport cocaine into and through the islands. Colombian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican criminal groups are the principal wholesale-level distributors of cocaine in Puerto Rico and the USVI. These criminal groups supply the drug principally to other Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers and USVI criminal groups for retail sale.

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## Abuse

Cocaine commonly is abused in both Puerto Rico and the USVI. Law enforcement and health officials report that both powdered and crack cocaine commonly are abused in Puerto Rico, while crack cocaine abuse is more prevalent than powdered cocaine abuse in the USVI. According to MHAASA, 14.3 percent of males and 9.9 percent of females (approximately 1,492 individuals) who underwent substance abuse treatment from

2000 to 2001 in Puerto Rico cited cocaine as the primary drug of abuse. Treatment data were not available for the USVI.

Law enforcement officials indicate that in both Puerto Rico and the USVI, cocaine primarily is abused by individuals residing in low-income neighborhoods. However, individuals in more affluent areas abuse the drug as well.

## Availability

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Seizure data reflect the ready availability of cocaine in Puerto Rico and the USVI. According to FDSS data, federal law enforcement authorities in Puerto Rico seized 6,852.2 kilograms in 1999, 6,352.9 kilograms in 2000, 5,109.7 kilograms in 2001, and 3,936.1 kilograms in 2002. The DEA Caribbean Division reported the following cocaine seizures in the USVI: 2,125.7 kilograms in FY2000; 643.2 kilograms in FY2001, and 345.3 kilograms in FY2002. CBP seized approximately 9,220 kilograms of cocaine in FY1999, 15,240 kilograms in FY2000, and 6,720 kilograms in FY2001 in Puerto Rico and the USVI. In FY2001 the USCG Greater Antilles Section seized 4,673 kilograms of cocaine. Some CBP and USCG seizures may be reflected in the FDSS data.

Prices for powdered and crack cocaine vary widely throughout Puerto Rico. The DEA Caribbean Division reported that in the second quarter of FY2002, powdered cocaine sold for \$12,500 to \$23,000 per kilogram and \$750 per ounce. At the retail level, personal use quantities of powdered cocaine—weighing approximately 0.3 grams and commonly called decks—sold for \$5 to \$20. Crack cocaine sold for \$4 to \$10 per vial and \$5 to \$6 per rock. Purity information for powdered and crack cocaine was not available.

Cocaine prices in the USVI also vary widely. The DEA Caribbean Division reported that in the second quarter of FY2002, powdered cocaine in

St. Thomas sold for \$10,000 to \$18,000 per kilogram with purity levels ranging between 85 and 95 percent, while an ounce of powdered cocaine sold for \$350 to \$550. A crack vial sold for \$80 to \$100, and a rock of crack sold for \$20 in St. Thomas. Powdered cocaine in St. Croix sold for approximately \$14,000 per kilogram with purity levels ranging between 85 and 90 percent, while an ounce sold for approximately \$700. A rock and a vial of crack cocaine—with purity levels of 80 to 90 percent—sold for \$50 and \$20, respectively, in St. Croix.

The percentage of drug-related federal sentences that were cocaine-related in Puerto Rico and the USVI in FY2001 was significantly higher than the national percentage as well as higher than the percentage for any other drug. According to USSC data, 77.7 percent of the drug-related federal sentences in Puerto Rico and 86.6 percent of the drug-related federal sentences in the USVI were cocaine-related compared with 42.5 percent nationwide. In Puerto Rico 69.5 percent of the drug-related federal sentences were powdered cocaine-related, and 8.2 percent were crack cocaine-related. In the USVI 53.3 percent of drug-related federal sentences were powdered cocaine-related, and 33.3 percent were crack cocaine-related. Nationally, 22.1 percent of drug-related federal sentences resulted from powdered cocaine offenses, and 20.4 percent resulted from crack cocaine offenses.

## Violence

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Cocaine distribution and abuse frequently are associated with violent crime in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Local law enforcement authorities report that retail-level cocaine distributors are heavily armed and commit violent crimes including murder and assault to control lucrative drug markets. In a series of raids conducted in September 2002, Puerto Rico Police Department

officials seized 110 kilograms of cocaine and multiple weapons including AK-47s, M16 rifles, and shotguns from several homes and vehicles in a low-income neighborhood known as La Perla. Numerous retail cocaine distributors were known to operate in the neighborhood.

## Production

Coca is not cultivated nor is cocaine produced in Puerto Rico or the USVI. Virtually all of the cocaine consumed in the world is produced in South America. Colombian DTOs produce most of the cocaine smuggled into Puerto Rico and the USVI.

Most of the crack sold in Puerto Rico and the USVI is converted locally from powdered

cocaine distributed on the islands. Retail-level distributors typically process crack cocaine in public housing projects and other low-income residential areas. Such locations often are heavily secured with armed guards. Children sometimes serve as lookouts.

## Transportation

Puerto Rico and the USVI are significant transshipment locations for cocaine smuggled into the continental United States. Most of the cocaine smuggled into the islands is transshipped to markets in the mainland United States including Miami, New York, and Newark. Dominican DTOs and criminal groups are the primary transporters of cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI; however, Colombian DTOs and Puerto Rican criminal groups also transport cocaine into and through the islands.

Drug transporters commonly use commercial maritime conveyances to smuggle cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. Cocaine is transported directly into Puerto Rico and the USVI from South American source countries or from transshipment countries in the Caribbean

### **Cocaine Movement Into the United States**

In 2001, 26 percent of the cocaine shipments intercepted by law enforcement and potentially en route to the United States transited the Caribbean Corridor (including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands), 72 percent transited the Mexico/Central American Corridor, and 2 percent was sent directly to the United States.

Source: Interagency Assessment of Cocaine Movement, 2001 and 2002.

including the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Sint Maarten/St. Martin, Jamaica, and the British Virgin Islands. Drug transporters use large freighters, containerized cargo ships, bulk cargo ships, cruise ships, and passenger ferries to transport cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. Cocaine transported on freighters and bulk cargo ships is concealed in false compartments and vessel components including fuel tanks. Cocaine transported on containerized cargo ships is concealed inside shipping containers among legitimate goods or in the walls of the container itself. DTOs and criminal groups also recruit passengers and crew members aboard cruise ships and ferries to transport cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. In September 2002 law enforcement officials arrested a crew member of a cruise ship in St. Thomas and seized 680 grams of cocaine that were concealed in the man's pants. In 2001 CBP seized 533.76 kilograms of cocaine from commercial maritime vessels in Puerto Rico. CBP seizure data are not available for the USVI.

Private maritime vessels frequently are used to transport cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. Go-fast boats, favored because of their stealth and speed, are the private vessels used most often to transport cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. Go-fast boats are used to retrieve cocaine from motherships and airdrops in the open ocean or to transport cocaine

into Puerto Rico and the USVI directly from source countries or transshipment points on various Caribbean islands. Go-fast boats frequently travel at night to avoid detection and transport cocaine to remote areas of Puerto Rico including the island of Vieques, Fajardo (on the east coast), Punta Tuna (on the southeast coast), Ponce (on the south coast), and Mona Island (a nature preserve off Puerto Rico's west coast). Virtually the entire territory of the USVI serves as a maritime arrival zone for go-fast boats because of the multiple inlets, cays, and miles of lightly patrolled coastline. Private yachts and fishing vessels also are used to transport cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI, although to a lesser extent. These vessels primarily retrieve drug shipments at sea for transportation to shore. In October 2002 law enforcement authorities seized about 500 kilograms of cocaine from a fishing vessel in the open ocean 84 miles south of St. Croix. Six Venezuelan men were detained and sent to Venezuela for prosecution. In 2001 CBP seized a total of 6,773.28 kilograms of cocaine from private maritime vessels in Puerto Rico. CBP seizure data are not available for the USVI.

Smaller amounts of cocaine are transported into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI via commercial aircraft and package delivery services. Couriers aboard commercial aircraft conceal cocaine internally, on their persons, or in luggage. Cocaine also is transported in cargo shipments aboard commercial aircraft. The drug often is intermingled with legitimate cargo and packaged in containers. Transporters also use package delivery services to transport cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI. In 2001, 122 kilograms of cocaine were seized as part of

Operation Jetway in Puerto Rico. That same year CBP seized 70 kilograms of cocaine from commercial aircraft at airports in Puerto Rico. Some of the CBP seizures may be included in Operation Jetway data.

### **Operation Jetway**

Operation Jetway is a domestic interdiction program supported by the DEA El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC). Drug seizures are reported to Operation Jetway by federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies across the nation at airports, train stations, bus stations, package shipment facilities, U.S. Post Offices, and airport hotels and motels.

DTOs and criminal groups frequently use private aircraft to transport cocaine into and through Puerto Rico and the USVI from source countries in South America and from transshipment points on other Caribbean islands. Drug transporters typically airdrop bales of cocaine into the open sea for retrieval by crewmen on maritime vessels. Private aircraft also transport cocaine to airports and private airstrips in Puerto Rico and the USVI, although to a lesser extent.

Overland conveyances often are used to transport cocaine within Puerto Rico and the USVI. After cocaine has been smuggled to the islands, criminal groups use overland conveyances, primarily private vehicles, to transport the drug to stash sites or distribution points. In 2001 CBP in Puerto Rico seized 25 kilograms of cocaine being transported by private vehicles, buses, and vans. (Similar seizure data are not available for the USVI.)

## **Distribution**

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Colombian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican criminal groups are the principal wholesale-level distributors of cocaine in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Wholesale distributors frequently manage

stash houses where cocaine is temporarily stored prior to local retail distribution or shipment to the U.S. mainland. A large cache of weapons usually is maintained at these locations.

Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers are the principal retail-level cocaine distributors in Puerto Rico. These distributors frequently manage stash houses where cocaine is temporarily stored and drug proceeds are counted. In Puerto Rico retail cocaine distribution typically occurs at *puntos de drogas*, or drug points. These drug points generally are located in or near public housing projects and other low-income neighborhoods. Typically, several drugs including crack, powdered cocaine, and heroin are available at drug points. Cocaine also is distributed from some businesses, including bars and nightclubs, and private homes.

In the USVI native Virgin Islanders, Colombians, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Arabs distribute cocaine, either as members of criminal

### Arrest of Polydrug Distributors in Puerto Rico

In October 2002 federal law enforcement authorities arrested 52 individuals in Ponce and surrounding towns for distributing powdered and crack cocaine, heroin, and marijuana. Authorities reported that the distributors used weapons and violence to protect and expand drug markets.

Source: DEA.

groups or working independently. Crack cocaine, the type of cocaine most commonly distributed in the USVI, generally is sold in hand-to-hand transactions on city streets. Powdered cocaine usually is sold at local bars and clubs.

## Heroin

Heroin poses a significant drug threat to Puerto Rico, although it poses only a minor threat to the USVI. Heroin abuse is a significant problem in Puerto Rico and is largely fueled by the availability of high purity South American heroin. According to local law enforcement authorities, very small quantities of Southeast Asian, Mexican black tar, and Mexican brown powdered heroin occasionally are available. Puerto Rico serves as a significant transshipment location for South American heroin smuggled to the continental United States. Heroin is transported into and through Puerto Rico primarily by air and maritime conveyances. Colombian and Dominican DTOs and criminal groups are the primary

transporters of heroin into and through Puerto Rico; however, Puerto Rican criminal groups also transport heroin into and through the commonwealth. Colombian and, to a lesser extent, Dominican and Puerto Rican criminal groups are the principal distributors of wholesale quantities of heroin in Puerto Rico. These criminal groups supply the drug principally to other Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers for retail sale. Heroin distribution in the USVI is very limited, and there is virtually no wholesale distribution of the drug. In the USVI retail-level heroin distribution is confined to a small Hispanic community in St. Croix.

## Abuse

Heroin abuse is a significant problem in Puerto Rico and is largely fueled by the availability of high purity South American heroin. More individuals were treated for heroin abuse than for any other illicit drug from 2000 to 2001, according to MHAASA. Twenty-three percent of males and 20 percent of females (approximately 2,453

individuals) who underwent substance abuse treatment from 2000 to 2001 cited heroin as their primary drug of abuse. The DEA Caribbean Division reports that injection is the most common method of administering heroin in Puerto Rico, although some abusers snort the drug. Although treatment data are not available for the USVI, law



enforcement and health professionals indicate that heroin abuse in the USVI is very limited.

Most heroin abuse in the USVI is confined to a small Hispanic community in St. Croix.

## **Availability**

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Heroin is readily available in Puerto Rico, while the availability of heroin in the USVI is limited. Almost all of this heroin is produced in South America, although local law enforcement officials report that very small quantities of Southeast Asian as well as Mexican black tar and Mexican brown powdered heroin occasionally are available. According to FDSS data, federal law enforcement authorities in Puerto Rico seized 16.8 kilograms of heroin in 1999, 43.6 kilograms in 2000, 114.2 kilograms in 2001, and 131.8 in 2002. The DEA Caribbean Division reported the following heroin seizures in the USVI: none in FY2000; 1.1 kilograms in FY2001, and 1.5 kilograms in FY2002. CBP seized approximately 14 kilograms of heroin in FY1999, 23 kilograms in FY2000, and 64 kilograms in FY2001 in Puerto Rico and the USVI. In FY2001 the USCG Greater Antillies Section made no heroin seizures. Some CBP and USCG seizures may be reflected in the FDSS data.

Heroin prices vary throughout Puerto Rico and the USVI. The DEA Caribbean Division reported

that in the second quarter of FY2002, heroin sold for \$70,000 to \$90,000 per kilogram in Puerto Rico. At the retail level, personal use quantities, commonly called decks, sold for \$5 to \$12. Purity information for heroin in Puerto Rico is not available. In St. Croix heroin sold for approximately \$20 per gram and \$10 per deck (0.5 grams of heroin) in the second quarter of FY2002, according to DEA. Heroin purity at the retail level in St. Croix sometimes is as high as 80 percent.

The percentage of drug-related federal sentences that were heroin-related in Puerto Rico in FY2001 was significantly higher than the national percentage, while in the USVI the percentage was slightly lower than the national percentage. According to USSC data, 17.9 percent of drug-related federal sentences in Puerto Rico were heroin-related compared with 7.2 percent nationally. In the USVI 6.7 percent of drug-related federal sentences in FY2001 were heroin-related.

## **Violence**

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Some violent crime in Puerto Rico is attributed to heroin distribution and abuse. In Puerto Rico heroin distributors engage in polydrug distribution and commit violent crimes, including murder, to protect their territory. Heroin abusers

sometimes commit robbery, burglary, carjacking, and home invasion to support their addictions. They often steal from family members to obtain funds to purchase heroin.

## **Production**

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Opium is not cultivated nor is heroin refined in Puerto Rico or the USVI. Heroin is produced primarily in four source regions: South America,

Mexico, Southeast Asia, and Southwest Asia. Most of the heroin available in Puerto Rico and the USVI is produced in South America.

## Transportation

Puerto Rico serves as an entry point for heroin destined for local markets and as a transshipment point for heroin smuggled into the U.S. mainland. Most of the heroin that is transported to the USVI is destined for local markets in St. Croix. Colombian and Dominican DTOs and criminal groups are the primary transporters of heroin into and through Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican criminal groups also transport heroin into and through the island. Heroin typically is shipped directly from South American source countries or from transshipment points in the Caribbean including the Dominican Republic, Sint Maarten, Trinidad, Tobago, Aruba, and Curaçao. The dominant transporters of heroin into the USVI as well as the transportation methods that they employ are not known.

Transporters smuggle heroin into and through Puerto Rico via couriers aboard commercial aircraft. Occasionally heroin is smuggled in air cargo shipments. Couriers typically conceal the drug internally, on their persons, or in luggage. According to federal law enforcement authorities, heroin sometimes is transported into Puerto Rico by couriers who travel aboard commercial aircraft from source countries to San Juan via major cities in the mainland United States, including Miami and New York. Heroin transported in air cargo shipments typically is packaged in containers intermingled with legitimate cargo. In 2001 approximately 5 kilograms of heroin were seized as part of Operation Jetway in Puerto Rico. That same year CBP seized 56 kilograms of heroin from commercial aircraft at airports in Puerto Rico. Some of the CBP seizures may be included in Operation Jetway data.

Drug transporters often smuggle heroin into Puerto Rico via commercial maritime conveyances. Heroin transported in commercial vessels usually is concealed inside shipping containers among legitimate goods or in false compartments

built into the vessel. Occasionally heroin is intermingled with cocaine shipments. In June 2002 CBP authorities seized 24 kilograms of heroin and 25 kilograms of cocaine found in a cargo storage area on a pier in San Juan. Drug-detection canines discovered the drugs, which were packaged into bricks, wrapped in plastic, and hidden inside boxes. In 2001 CBP seized a total of 28 kilograms of heroin from commercial maritime vessels in Puerto Rico, most of which was seized in one incident at the Port of San Juan. (See text box.)

### **Large Heroin and Cocaine Seizure at Port of San Juan**

In October 2001 CBP authorities seized 19 kilograms of South American heroin and 239 kilograms of cocaine at the Port of San Juan. The drugs were discovered in a container aboard a cargo vessel.

Source: CBP; DEA.

Drug transporters use couriers—including passengers and crew members—aboard cruise ships and ferries to smuggle heroin into Puerto Rico. In July 2002 federal law enforcement officials in San Juan seized 1.4 kilograms of South American heroin from a passenger on a cruise ship that arrived from Aruba. Authorities arrested the courier, a male Colombian national who was transporting the heroin in a video camera case. In October 2001 federal law enforcement officials arrested seven individuals for smuggling heroin into Puerto Rico from Aruba on a cruise ship. Each individual had swallowed between 36 and 98 condoms containing the drug. Most of the individuals were Colombian nationals.

Overland conveyances are used to transport heroin within Puerto Rico and St. Croix. After heroin has been smuggled to the islands, transporters deliver the drug to stash sites or distribution locations by private vehicle.

## Distribution

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Colombian and, to a lesser extent, Dominican and Puerto Rican criminal groups are the principal wholesale-level distributors of heroin in Puerto Rico. These distributors manage stash houses where heroin is temporarily stored prior to local distribution or subsequent shipment to the U.S. mainland. A large cache of weapons usually is kept at these stash houses.

Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers are the principal retail-level distributors of heroin in Puerto Rico. These retail heroin distributors also manage stash houses. Retail-level heroin distribution in Puerto Rico typically occurs at *puntos de drogas*, or drug

points, which usually are located in or near public housing projects and other low-income neighborhoods. Generally, several drugs including heroin, crack, and powdered cocaine are available at drug points. Heroin also occasionally is distributed from businesses, including bars and nightclubs, and from private homes.

Heroin distribution in the USVI is very limited. Virtually no wholesale distribution occurs on the islands. Retail-level heroin distribution is largely confined to a small Hispanic community in St. Croix. Typically, retail heroin distributors on the island are heroin abusers who sell the drug to other abusers.

## Marijuana

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Marijuana is one of the most widely available and commonly abused illicit drugs in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Most of the marijuana available in Puerto Rico is produced in Mexico; however, locally produced marijuana as well as marijuana produced in Colombia and Jamaica also is available. Most marijuana available in the USVI arrives from southern island locations such as St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines; however, its origin is unknown. Cannabis cultivation in Puerto Rico is limited. Most of the cannabis grown in Puerto Rico is cultivated in small plots in the central mountain area and in the Rio Grande region of northeast Puerto Rico. Cannabis produced locally in the USVI usually is cultivated outdoors; however, poor terrain and arid climate

across the USVI produce a low-quality product. Puerto Rican criminal groups primarily use couriers aboard commercial aircraft and package delivery services to transport marijuana into Puerto Rico. Colombian DTOs often use the transportation services of Dominican DTOs and criminal groups to smuggle marijuana to Puerto Rico by maritime conveyances. Marijuana primarily is transported to the USVI in small maritime vessels. Puerto Rican criminal groups and local independent dealers are the principal distributors of wholesale and retail quantities of marijuana in Puerto Rico. In the USVI local criminal groups and independent dealers are the primary wholesale and retail distributors of marijuana.

## Abuse

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Marijuana is one of the most commonly abused illicit drugs in Puerto Rico and the USVI. According to MHAASA, 23.4 percent of males and 16.3 percent of females (approximately 2,443 individuals) who underwent substance abuse treatment from 2000 to 2001 in Puerto Rico cited marijuana as their primary drug of abuse.

According to law enforcement officials, marijuana abuse likely is much more widespread than indicated by treatment admission numbers. Marijuana abuse spans most socioeconomic and age groups. Treatment data for the USVI are unavailable; however, USVI law enforcement officials indicate that marijuana abuse is widespread.

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## Availability

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Marijuana is widely available in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Most of the marijuana available in Puerto Rico is produced in Mexico; to a lesser extent, marijuana produced locally or in Colombia or Jamaica also is available. Typically, the marijuana available in the USVI is transported from islands in the Caribbean; the source of the marijuana is not known. According to FDSS data, federal law enforcement officials in Puerto Rico seized 565.4 kilograms of marijuana in 1999, 411.9 kilograms in 2000, 299.2 kilograms in 2001, and 571.1 kilograms in 2002. The DEA Caribbean Division reported the following marijuana seizures in the USVI: 0.3 kilograms in FY2000; 28.6 kilograms in FY2001, and 465.5 kilograms in FY2002. CBP seized approximately 1,549 kilograms of marijuana in FY1999, 399 kilograms in FY2000, and 3,099 kilograms in FY2001 in Puerto Rico and the USVI. In FY2001 the USCG Greater Antillies Section seized 9,657 kilograms of marijuana. Some CBP and USCG seizures may be reflected in the FDSS data.

Marijuana prices vary throughout Puerto Rico and the USVI. The DEA Caribbean Division reported that in the second quarter of FY2002, marijuana produced in Mexico sold for \$1,100 to \$1,500 per pound in Puerto Rico. An ounce of marijuana sold for approximately \$120, with smaller retail quantities selling for \$6, \$10, and \$20. In St. Thomas and St. John, marijuana sold for approximately \$1,300 per kilogram, \$600 per pound, \$100 per ounce, and \$10 per bag in the second quarter of FY2002.

The percentage of drug-related federal sentences that were marijuana-related in Puerto Rico and the USVI in FY2001 was significantly lower than the national percentage. According to USSC data, 3.0 percent of drug-related federal sentences in Puerto Rico and 6.7 percent of drug-related federal sentences in the USVI were marijuana-related compared with 32.8 percent nationally.

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## Violence

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The level of violence directly attributed to marijuana distribution in Puerto Rico and the USVI is low. However, distributors who sell marijuana often distribute other drugs, including cocaine and heroin, and commit violent crimes to protect their territory.

Violent crime is not often associated with marijuana abuse in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Marijuana abusers generally are not violent, and the drug's effects typically depend on the user's personality and expectations. Low doses of marijuana tend to induce relaxation, and high doses can cause image distortion, loss of personal identity, fantasies, and hallucinations.

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## Production

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Most of the marijuana available in Puerto Rico is produced in Mexico because the terrain, temperature, and rainfall in Puerto Rico are not conducive to large-scale cannabis cultivation. When cannabis is cultivated in Puerto Rico, it

generally is grown outdoors; however, cannabis sometimes is cultivated indoors. Outdoor cultivation typically occurs in small plots in the central mountain area and in the Rio Grande region of northeastern Puerto Rico.

Cannabis also is cultivated—primarily outdoors—in the USVI; however, poor terrain and arid climate across the USVI produce a low quality product. Nearly all the cannabis cultivated is intended for local distribution. Cultivation sites most commonly are located in rural areas across the islands and typically contain 100 to 200

cannabis plants. In August 2002 federal and local law enforcement authorities seized approximately 1,100 cannabis plants in a series of raids in St. Croix. Law enforcement officials located the plants using helicopters. The plants were scattered in plots throughout the western half of the island. No arrests were made.

## Transportation

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Puerto Rican criminal groups are the primary transporters of Mexico-produced marijuana into Puerto Rico. These groups primarily use couriers aboard commercial aircraft as well as package delivery services to transport marijuana to the island. Couriers, typically Puerto Rican men, generally conceal the drug on their persons or in luggage. Couriers most often transport the drug from California and Texas, often transiting U.S. cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Indianapolis, Orlando, Miami, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh before arriving in Puerto Rico. In June 2002 law enforcement officials at San Juan International Airport arrested a male resident of San Juan and seized 12.7 kilograms of marijuana. The man had traveled from Los Angeles to San Juan via Chicago and had concealed the marijuana in a suitcase, intermingled with clothing. Marijuana transported into Puerto Rico via package delivery services usually is mailed from California or Texas. In 2001, 331 kilograms of

marijuana were seized as part of Operation Jetway in Puerto Rico. That same year CBP seized 205 kilograms of marijuana from commercial aircraft at airports in Puerto Rico. Some of the CBP seizures may be included in Operation Jetway data.

Dominican DTOs and criminal groups are the primary transporters of Colombian marijuana into Puerto Rico. Colombian DTOs often use the transportation services of these Dominican DTOs and criminal groups to smuggle marijuana into the territory. These DTOs and criminal groups primarily transport the marijuana in small maritime vessels, including go-fast boats.

Most of the marijuana available in the USVI is transported by small maritime vessels from southern island locations including St. Lucia or St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Neither the principal transporters nor the origin of marijuana arriving in the USVI from these locations is known.

## Distribution

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Puerto Rican criminal groups and local independent dealers are the principal wholesale- and retail-level distributors of marijuana in Puerto Rico. In the USVI local criminal groups and independent dealers are the primary wholesale- and retail-level distributors of marijuana.

Marijuana is sold at the retail level at various locations in Puerto Rico. Most retail marijuana

distribution occurs at *puntos de drogas*, or drug points. Retail distributors who sell marijuana usually sell other drugs, including cocaine and heroin. Retail distribution of marijuana also takes place in private residences, bars, and nightclubs. In the USVI marijuana is sold via hand-to-hand transactions on city streets and in residences, bars, and clubs.

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## Other Dangerous Drugs

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Other dangerous drugs (ODDs) pose a low but increasing threat to Puerto Rico and the USVI. ODDs abused in Puerto Rico include the stimulant MDMA and diverted pharmaceuticals, including meperidines such as Demerol; oxycodones such as Percocet; hydromorphones such as Dilaudid; and benzodiazepines such as Valium and Xanax. MDMA commonly is abused at bars and nightclubs in San Juan. Young individuals, primarily upper-middle-class youth, are the primary abusers of MDMA in Puerto Rico. Dominican and Puerto Rican criminal groups recruit some of these young

individuals as couriers to transport MDMA from Europe to Puerto Rico via the Dominican Republic aboard commercial aircraft. Young Puerto Rican men are the primary retail distributors of MDMA. There is little wholesale distribution of MDMA in Puerto Rico. The diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs pose minor but continuing threats to Puerto Rico. In the USVI the distribution and abuse of MDMA, as well as the diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical drugs, are limited.

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## MDMA

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MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), also known as Adam, ecstasy, XTC, E, and X, is a stimulant and low-level hallucinogen. MDMA was patented in 1914 in Germany where it was given to psychiatric patients to assist in psychotherapy. This practice was never approved by the American Psychological Association or the Food and Drug Administration. Sometimes called the hug drug, abusers claim that the drug helps them to be more “in touch” with others and “opens channels of communication.” However, abuse of the drug can cause psychological problems similar to those associated with methamphetamine and cocaine abuse including confusion, depression, sleeplessness, anxiety, and paranoia. The physical effects can include muscle tension, involuntary teeth clenching, blurred vision, and increased heart rate and blood pressure. MDMA abuse can also cause a marked increase in body temperature leading to muscle breakdown, kidney failure, cardiovascular system failure, stroke, or seizure as reported in some fatal cases. Research suggests MDMA abuse may result in long-term and sometimes permanent damage to parts of the brain that are critical to thought and memory.

MDMA primarily is abused by upper-middle-class youth in Puerto Rico, mainly in the San Juan area. Most of the MDMA consumed in

Puerto Rico is produced in laboratories in Europe. MDMA most often is transported into and through Puerto Rico by couriers aboard commercial aircraft. Dominican and Puerto Rican criminal groups often recruit young couriers to transport MDMA to San Juan International Airport from Europe via the Dominican Republic. Most of the MDMA that reaches Puerto Rico is transshipped to the U.S. mainland. Limited quantities remain on the island for distribution in the San Juan area. CBP seizures of MDMA tablets at San Juan International Airport increased from zero in FY1999 to approximately 26,000 tablets in FY2000.

Some MDMA is transported into Puerto Rico in commercial maritime conveyances. From September 11 through 30, 2001, law enforcement officials seized a total of 96,000 MDMA tablets from ferries that transport passengers between San Juan and the Dominican Republic. Law enforcement officials believe that immediately following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, transporters temporarily shifted from smuggling MDMA aboard commercial aircraft to smuggling the drug via maritime conveyances. In 2001 CBP officials in Puerto Rico seized 30 kilograms of MDMA that were transported aboard commercial maritime vessels.

There is little wholesale distribution of MDMA in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican local independent dealers, usually young men, are the principal retail distributors of MDMA in Puerto Rico. The drug primarily is available at raves, private parties, and in bars and nightclubs in

San Juan. MDMA generally sells for \$25 to \$40 per tablet at the retail level in Puerto Rico.

MDMA distribution and abuse in the USVI are limited but increasing. DEA reports that MDMA sells for \$25 to \$35 per tablet at the retail level in the USVI.

## **Diverted Pharmaceuticals**

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Diverted pharmaceuticals pose a minor but continuing threat to Puerto Rico and the USVI. Pharmaceuticals that commonly are diverted in Puerto Rico include meperidines, such as Demerol; oxycodones, such as Percocet; hydro-morphones, such as Dilaudid; and benzodiazepines, such as Valium and Xanax. In the USVI there is some limited diversion and abuse of Demerol, Percocet, and Tylenol with codeine.

The most common diversion methods used in Puerto Rico to illegally obtain pharmaceuticals include theft from pharmaceutical factories, fraudulent prescriptions, and “doctor shopping.” Puerto Rico has the largest number of pharmaceutical manufacturers in the United States, and thefts from these factories are relatively common. Doctor shopping is a practice in which individuals who may or may not have a legitimate ailment visit numerous physicians to obtain drugs in excess of what should be prescribed.

Law enforcement officials indicate that Puerto Rican criminal groups and local independent dealers are the dominant wholesale and retail distributors of diverted pharmaceuticals. Individuals of various ages and socioeconomic backgrounds abuse pharmaceutical drugs in Puerto Rico; however, health authorities report that these drugs are more frequently abused by women than by men. Retail distributors of diverted pharmaceuticals typically sell the drugs to acquaintances and established customers and also abuse the drugs themselves. According to DEA, a 2-milligram tablet of Xanax sold for \$5, and Percocet and Demerol tablets sold for \$10 each in the second quarter of FY2002 in Puerto Rico. The primary diversion methods and prices for diverted pharmaceuticals in the USVI are not known but likely are similar to the methods and prices in Puerto Rico.

## **Outlook**

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Cocaine will remain a significant drug threat to Puerto Rico and the USVI. The location of Puerto Rico and the USVI between drug source countries and the U.S. mainland ensures that the islands will continue to serve as significant trans-shipment points for cocaine. Further, cocaine will remain readily available and commonly abused in Puerto Rico and USVI. Dominican DTOs and criminal groups will remain the dominant cocaine transporters to Puerto Rico and the USVI due to their extensive and established transportation networks. Colombian, Dominican, and Puerto Rican criminal groups likely will remain the principal

wholesale-level distributors of cocaine in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers and USVI criminal groups likely will remain the principal retail-level distributors of cocaine in Puerto Rico and the USVI.

Heroin likely will continue to pose a major threat to Puerto Rico due to the availability and abuse of high purity South American heroin. Puerto Rico also will remain a significant trans-shipment location for heroin destined for the U.S. mainland. Dominican DTOs and criminal groups

may increasingly ship heroin along with cocaine in maritime vessels to satisfy increased heroin demand in both Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland. Colombian and, to a lesser extent, Dominican and Puerto Rican criminal groups likely will remain the principal distributors of wholesale quantities of heroin in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican and Dominican criminal groups and local independent dealers likely will remain the principal retail distributors of heroin. The heroin threat to the USVI most likely will remain low, as the threat is currently confined to the small Hispanic community in St. Croix, and there are no indications that this situation will change.

Marijuana likely will remain one of the most commonly available and abused illicit drugs in Puerto Rico and the USVI. Marijuana produced in Mexico likely will remain the type most commonly available in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican criminal groups will remain the primary transporters of marijuana produced in Mexico.

Puerto Rican criminal groups and local independent dealers will remain the principal wholesale and retail distributors of marijuana in the territory. In the USVI local criminal groups and independent dealers will remain the primary wholesale and retail distributors of marijuana.

ODDs likely will remain a low but increasing threat to Puerto Rico and the USVI. MDMA availability and abuse may increase in Puerto Rico, primarily due to the drug's popularity among young individuals. The diversion and abuse of pharmaceuticals in Puerto Rico will continue at current levels. Levels of MDMA abuse likely will increase and diversion and abuse of pharmaceuticals will remain stable in the USVI.

There are no reports of methamphetamine production, distribution, or abuse in Puerto Rico and the USVI, and this situation is likely to remain unchanged.



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## *Sources*

### **Territorial and Regional**

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Caribbean Central University

Commonwealth of Puerto Rico

Department of Justice

Mental Health and Anti-Addiction Services Administration

Planning Board

Special Bureau of Investigations

Puerto Rico Police Department

*The San Juan Star*

Territory of the U.S. Virgin Islands

*The Virgin Islands Daily News*

Virgin Islands National Guard

### **National**

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Executive Office of the President

Office of National Drug Control Policy

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

Investigative Support Center

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Directorate of Border and Transportation Security

Bureau of Customs and Border Protection

Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement

U.S. Coast Guard

Greater Antilles Section

U.S. Department of Justice

Drug Enforcement Administration

Caribbean Division

El Paso Intelligence Center

Operation Jetway

Federal-wide Drug Seizure System

U.S. Sentencing Commission

U.S. Treasury Department

Financial Crimes Enforcement Network

Internal Revenue Service

**Other**

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*Associated Press*

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