



Emerging trends and concerns

- Illicit methamphetamine manufacture remains a concern and methamphetamine pill pressing equipment and small-scale clandestine crystalline methamphetamine manufacturing operations continue to be seized.
- Crystalline methamphetamine use has expanded rapidly in Thailand during the past few years as indicated by the substantial increases in seizures, arrests and drug treatment admissions related to crystalline methamphetamine.
- Methamphetamine in pill form remains the primary drug of use in Thailand. All indicators suggest that the trafficking and use of methamphetamine pills increased in 2011.
- New psychoactive substances have been identified as an emerging concern.

Overview of the drug situation

The methamphetamine market in Thailand is one of the largest in the region. The trafficking and use of methamphetamine pills continues to be the top drug-related law enforcement and public health concern in Thailand. In addition, the market for the more potent and profitable crystalline form of the drug has grown rapidly during the past few years. In 2011, seizure, arrest and drug treatment data related to crystalline methamphetamine reached record levels. This reflects the increasing manufacture and trafficking from neighbouring Myanmar and the Islamic Republic of Iran as well as the growing demand among Thailand's expanding drug user population.

A large portion of the methamphetamine smuggled into Thailand is intended for the domestic market. However, considerable quantities are further trafficked to neighboring countries and smaller amounts are trafficked beyond the region. Drug criminal organizations continue to target Thailand as a transit hub for the smuggling of illicit drugs and their precursor chemicals. West African and Iranian drug trafficking organizations traffic methamphetamine into and

through Thailand. In addition, the diversion and smuggling of bulk quantities of precursor chemicals, primarily in the form of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, through Thailand to manufacturing sites in Myanmar and, to a lesser extent, Cambodia has become a major concern.

Cannabis use continues to be prevalent throughout Thailand. In the southern part of Thailand, the illicit trafficking and use of kratom¹ remains a problem. In addition, there are indicators to suggest that the heroin and cocaine markets in Thailand may be expanding.

Patterns and trends of drug use

Drug use – Methamphetamine pills continue to be the most widely used drug in Thailand, according to government expert perception. Smoking is indicated to be the most common route of administration, followed by oral ingestion. The injecting use of methamphetamine pills also takes place in Thailand, albeit at low levels. During the past few years, an

¹ Kratom is a substance derived from *mitragyna speciosa* and produces both stimulant and sedative effects.

estimated 70-80% of all drug users in Thailand have used methamphetamine pills (ONCB 2011c). In addition, the use of crystalline methamphetamine, most of which is indicated to take place in major cities, has increased substantially in Thailand. Ecstasy use is also concentrated primarily in urban areas and major tourist destinations, however it has shown a declining trend in recent years.

Cannabis is the second most common drug of use in Thailand and its use is indicated to have increased in each of the past five years. Kratom is used predominantly in the southern part of Thailand. Most kratom users typically chew fresh kratom leaves or boil the kratom leaves and then drink the resulting liquid. In more recent years, it has become common for younger users to mix the resulting liquid in a cocktail with cough syrup, a soft drink and ice cubes.

The use of opiates is indicated to have been on the rise of late. Record quantities of ketamine have been seized in Thailand during the past two years but its use appears to have stabilized. New psychoactive substances such as mephedrone and synthetic cannabinoids have been

identified as an emerging concern, although data on this phenomenon are currently limited.

Injecting drug use

The injecting use of methamphetamine has emerged in Thailand in recent years but remains far lower than the injecting use of opiates. Injection is the second most common route of administration for crystalline methamphetamine and the third most common route of administration for methamphetamine pills (smoking and oral ingestion are the most common modes). Injection is the primary route of administration for heroin and the second most common route of administration for opium (smoking is the most common).

A survey of people who inject drugs (PWID) in three major cities (Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Songkhla) and conducted in 2010, found that HIV prevalence among PWID in Thailand was 21.9% (DDCMPH 2012). However, some previous studies have estimated the HIV prevalence among PWID as high

Table 87. Rank of use of selected drugs in Thailand, 2007-2011

Drug type	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Crystalline methamphetamine	3	8	7	7	3
Methamphetamine pills	1	3	1	1	1
Ecstasy	6	7	9	9	8
Cannabis herb	2	1	2	2	2
Heroin	5	6	5	5	7
Inhalants	3	4	3	3	5
Ketamine	6	9	•	•	9
Kratom	4	2	6	6	4
Opium	9	5	4	4	6

• = Not reported
Source(s): DAINAP

Table 88. Trend in use of selected drugs in Thailand, 2007-2011

Drug type	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Crystalline methamphetamine	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑
Methamphetamine pills	↑	↑	↔	↔	↑
Ecstasy	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓
Ketamine	↓	↑	•	•	↔
Cannabis herb	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Heroin	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑

↑ = Increasing, ↓ = Decreasing, ↔ = Stable, • = Not reported
Source(s): DAINAP

as 35 to 50% (NAPAC 2010; ONCB 2010c). HIV prevalence among injecting opiates users who present for treatment at drug treatment and rehabilitation centers in Thailand remains high, at levels ranging from 30 to 50%. The study indicated that access to HIV prevention services for PWID remains low (DDCMPH 2012).

Drug treatment

In 2011, a total of 183,547 persons underwent drug treatment in Thailand, a 38% increase from the number of persons who underwent treatment in 2010. Methamphetamine pills continued to be the most common drug of use among persons in treatment in 2011 and were the primary drug of use for 86% of the drug users who received treatment in specialized treatment facilities and correctional institutions during the year. This figure has remained relatively stable since 2004. However, the total number of persons who received treatment for methamphetamine pill use in 2011 (158,316 persons) represents a 40% increase from the previous year (113,430). In addition, there was a substantial increase in the number of crystalline methamphetamine users admitted to drug treatment in 2011. The 6,728 persons who received treatment for crystalline methamphetamine use during the year represent a near three-fold increase compared with the number of persons treated for crystalline methamphetamine use in 2010 (2,353). In 2011, crystalline methamphetamine users accounted for nearly 4% of all persons in drug treatment compared

with less than 1% from 2007 to 2009. Treatment admissions related to ecstasy remain low and declined by 18% in 2011 to 172 persons compared with 209 persons in 2010. During the past five years, women have accounted for about 9% of all persons in treatment (ONCB 2012e).

Drug-related arrests, seizures and prices

Drug-related arrests – The total number of drug-related arrests in Thailand increased by 19%, from 208,344 arrests in 2010 to 247,796 arrests in 2011, of which almost 87% involved ATS. Since 2007, the average proportion of all drug-related arrests involving ATS is approximately 80% (ONCB 2012e).

The number of persons arrested for methamphetamine pills in 2011 totaled 191,956, representing more than 77% of all drug-related arrests during the year and a 22% increase from the number of persons arrested for methamphetamine pills in 2010. Arrests related to crystalline methamphetamine have increased by a factor of more than 12 during the past five years. In 2011, the number of arrests related to crystalline methamphetamine more than doubled, to 22,823 arrests, the highest total ever reported. Arrests related to ecstasy have shown a declining trend during the past several years. The 187 ecstasy-related arrests in 2011 is the lowest total reported since 2004 (ONCB 2012e).

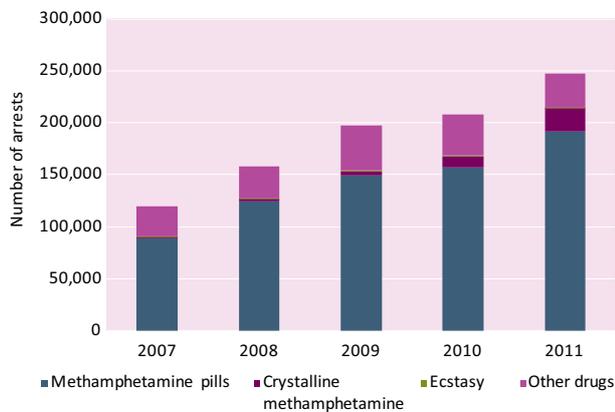
The number of arrests related to kratom in 2011 (13,134) accounted for about 5% of all drug-related

Table 89. Drug treatment admissions in Thailand by drug type, 2007-2011

Drug type	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Methamphetamine pills	49,131	79,977	101,971	113,430	158,316
Crystalline methamphetamine	484	582	930	2,353	6,728
Ecstasy	152	237	333	209	172
Cannabis herb	5,936	6,155	8,736	7,471	7,136
Cocaine	25	17	19	18	15
Cough medicine	85	36	76	45	81
Heroin	1,204	1,107	1,374	1,414	2,115
Inhalants	2,680	3,911	6,495	4,709	3,535
Ketamine	4	9	12	12	13
Kratom*	969	1,067	2,030	2,357	2,835
Opium	1,532	2,019	2,081	1,910	2,601
Total	62,202	95,117	124,057	133,928	183,547

*Includes users of kratom in leaf and liquid form
Source(s): ONCB 2012e

Figure 30. ATS arrests as a proportion of the total drug-related arrests in Thailand, 2007-2011

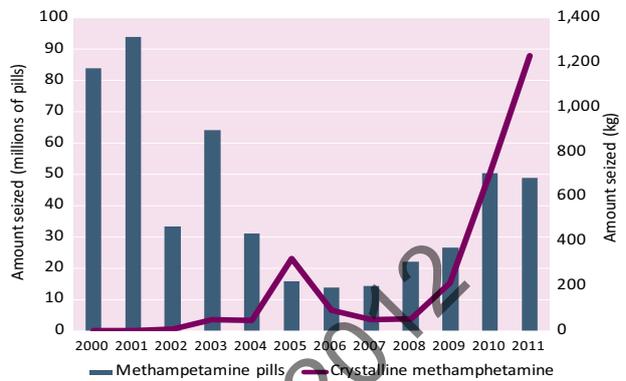


Source(s): DAINAP; ONCB 2012e

arrests during the year compared with 8% in 2010. The large number of arrests involving kratom during the past few years is most likely due to increased law enforcement efforts targeting the illicit trafficking and use of kratom. The number of arrests related to heroin increased by one third in 2011. Despite this increase, however, the combined number of persons arrested for opiates (heroin and opium) in Thailand remains comparatively small, accounting for less than 1% of the total drug-related arrests in each of the past four years (ONCB 2012e).

Drug seizures – Seizures of methamphetamine pills in 2011 totaled almost 49.4 million, which is a slight (1%) increase over the previous year and the highest

Figure 31. Seizures of methamphetamine (pill and crystalline) in Thailand, 2000-2011



Source(s): DAINAP; ONCB 2012e

total reported since 2003 when approximately 64.2 million pills were seized. During the first eight months of 2012, the number of pills seized in Thailand (50.5 million) has already surpassed the 2011 total.

Crystalline methamphetamine seizures have increased substantially during the past few years. In 2011, more than 1.2 mt of crystalline methamphetamine were seized in Thailand, representing a 75% increase over the 706 kg seized in 2010 and the highest total ever reported in the country. The sharp increase of crystalline methamphetamine seizures during the past few years is due to larger amounts being trafficked from Myanmar and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Table 90. Drug-related arrests in Thailand, 2007-2011

Drug type	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Methamphetamine pills	88,964	124,800	149,441	157,683	191,956
Crystalline methamphetamine	1,845	2,395	4,488	10,463	22,823
Ecstasy	453	592	496	217	187
Cannabis herb	12,837	13,155	18,579	15,257	13,721
Cannabis resin	14	13	21	24	16
Cocaine	150	109	125	96	82
Codeine	381	82	119	6	8
Heroin	542	481	856	838	1,115
Inhalants	6,753	6,361	6,528	4,952	3,420
Ketamine	101	206	266	204	177
Kratom	5,571	7,920	14,378	16,276	13,134
Opium (raw and prepared)	943	907	1,003	843	738
Others	1,004	850	1,487	1,485	419
Total	119,558	157,871	197,787	208,344	247,796

Source(s): ONCB 2012e

Table 91. Seizures of selected drugs in Thailand, 2007-2011

Drug type	Measurement	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Methamphetamine pills	pills	12,783,761	20,023,705	24,638,320	48,793,951	49,365,700
Crystalline methamphetamine	kg	48.3	54.3	213.2	706.0	1,232.0
Ecstasy*	pills	92,336	49,833	61,089	16,647	21,115
Cannabis herb	kg	17,226.1	21,105.9	26,070.8	22,415.2	14,302.0
Cannabis resin	kg	1.7	29.9	10.2	55.4	72.5
Cocaine	kg	18.9	11.5	9.3	31.1	31.8
Codeine	kg	776.2	141.7	97.6	14.0	4.1
Heroin	kg	294.6	199.9	143.1	137.6	547.5
Inhalants	kg	152.1	165.8	165.4	133.0	100.2
Ketamine	kg	2.8	18.5	20.6	166.7	78.0
Kratom**	kg	42,712.6	15,675.6	29,917.8	44,206.2	32,913.6
Opium (raw and prepared)	kg	72.6	117.9	111.1	157.9	42.7

* Ecstasy pill seizures converted into estimated kg equivalents at 1 pill = 250-300 mg. ** Combined seizures of kratom leaves and kratom liquid. Source(s): DAINAP; ONCB 2012e

Ecstasy seizures have shown a general downward trend during the past five years. Whereas the number of ecstasy pills seized in Thailand increased by about 27% in 2011, the 21,115 pills seized during the year is the second lowest total reported since 2000.

Large quantities of pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine have been seized in Thailand. In 2011, more than 9.6 million pseudoephedrine tablets were seized in eight separate cases compared with 33.4 million pseudoephedrine tablets seized in 13 separate cases in 2010. Most of the pills are smuggled by drug traffickers from Thailand and Myanmar to illicit methamphetamine manufacturing centres in Myanmar and Cambodia.

Heroin seizures showed a four-fold increase in 2011, to 548 kg compared with 138 kg seized in 2010, after having declined in each of the three previous years. Seizures of opium declined by 73% in 2011 to about 43 kg, the lowest total reported during the past decade. The 78 kg of ketamine seized in Thailand in 2011 is less than half of the amount seized during the previous year (167 kg). However, the amounts of ketamine seized in each of the past two years are the highest totals reported from the country during the past decade.

Drug prices – The retail price of methamphetamine pills has remained relatively stable in Thailand during the past few years, ranging from about USD 5 to USD 9. Prices continued to be lowest in the northern parts of the country, which are located nearer to illicit

manufacturing centres in Myanmar. The price for one gram of crystalline methamphetamine ranged from about USD 67 to USD 100.

Sources of illicit drugs

Myanmar remains the source of the vast majority of methamphetamine pills seized in Thailand, although some quantities may also originate from Lao PDR (INCB 2010; INCSR Lao PDR 2012). Most of the crystalline methamphetamine seized in Thailand also originates from Myanmar as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some quantities of crystalline methamphetamine found in Thailand are also indicated to originate from Cambodia (ONCB 2010b) and various countries in West Africa (INCSR Thailand 2012).

However, since 2009, law enforcement authorities in Thailand have uncovered a number of small-scale methamphetamine pill pressing operations and 'kitchen-type' crystalline methamphetamine manufacturing operations located in Bangkok and in surrounding provinces as well as in the northern province of Chiang Rai (ONCB 2010a). In 2011, methamphetamine pill pressing operations were dismantled and pill pressing machines and other equipment were seized in Bangkok as well as in Pathum Thani, Samut Prakarn and Chonburi provinces. This may indicate a re-emergence of illicit methamphetamine pill manufacture in Thailand. In addition, in July 2011, one Iranian

Table 92. Retail prices for ATS in Thailand (USD), 2007-2011

Drug type	Measurement*	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Methamphetamine pills	per pill	3 – 14	6 – 10	7 – 8.5	5 – 10	5 – 9
Crystalline methamphetamine	per gram	43 – 86	71 – 86	71 – 86	67 – 100	67 – 100
Ecstasy	per pill	9 – 25	23 – 29	23 – 35	12 – 18	12 – 18

Note: Drug price data calculated on average exchange rates of Thai Baht to USD for each year. * Assumes price at retail purity levels, not per gram of pure substance.

Source(s): DAINAP; ONCB 2011a; ONCB 2011d; ONCB 2012a

national was arrested for attempting to manufacture crystalline methamphetamine in his condominium in Bangkok (ONCB 2012b).

Most of the ecstasy found in Thailand is trafficked into the country from Malaysia (ONCB 2012c). Some quantities of ecstasy are also trafficked into Thailand from Europe and North America (ONCB 2012b).

Opium cultivation in Thailand has declined to insignificant levels over the past few decades. During the August 2011 – January 2012 period, opium poppy cultivation was estimated at about 157 ha, a decline of about 20% compared with the same period in the previous year (ONCB 2012d). Most of the opium and heroin available on the illicit market in Thailand originates from Myanmar, with smaller quantities originating from Afghanistan (UNODC 2011a).

Trafficking – The large majority (more than 80%) of the methamphetamine pills trafficked into Thailand are trafficked across the northern border with Myanmar. Smaller quantities are smuggled into Thailand from Lao PDR and Cambodia (ONCB 2010d).

Large quantities of crystalline methamphetamine are smuggled into Thailand from Myanmar and the Islamic Republic of Iran for domestic consumption and for further trafficking to Malaysia, the Philippines, Japan and Hong Kong, China (ONCB 2012c). In 2011, the majority of crystalline methamphetamine seized in Thailand (at least 60%) was indicated to have been smuggled into the country from Myanmar (ONCB & NSB 2012).

Iranian drug trafficking groups smuggle methamphetamine into Thailand primarily through countries in the Middle East and South-West Asia (ONCB 2012a). In 2011, more than 30 Iranian nationals were arrested in Thailand for attempting to smuggle crystalline methamphetamine into the country. A total of 57 kg of methamphetamine, including 15 kg of liquid methamphetamine, were

seized from Iranian air passenger couriers in Thailand during the year (ONCB & NSB 2012).

In 2011, a total of 138 West Africans were arrested in Thailand for drug trafficking, of which 102 persons were nationals of Nigeria. Approximately 42 kg of crystalline methamphetamine were seized from them, as well as about 12 kg of cocaine (ONCB & NSB at 2012). Most of the African couriers arrested in Thailand boarded flights in West Africa and transited primarily through Kenya and Ethiopia (ONCB 2012a). West African drug trafficking groups typically smuggle small quantities (with high frequency) of methamphetamine and other illicit drugs – primarily cocaine and heroin – into Thailand (ONCB & NSB 2012).

Thailand continues to be used by drug traffickers as a transit country for heroin manufactured in South-East and South-West Asia to international markets. West African drug trafficking groups often use nationals of Pakistan and Thailand to traffic heroin into and through Thailand. In 2011, a total of eight Pakistan nationals were arrested with 2 kg of heroin, compared with 17 Pakistan nationals arrested with 12.3 kg of heroin in 2010 (ONCB 2012a).

A large portion of the cocaine trafficked into Thailand is trafficked from producing countries in South America by African drug trafficking networks, usually by air passenger couriers, a number of which are nationals of Thailand and the Philippines (ONCB 2012a). In August 2012, seven female Thai nationals were arrested at Phnom Penh International Airport for attempting to smuggle approximately 30 kg of cocaine, which is believed to have been destined for Thailand and other markets in the region (NACD 2012d). In addition, it is highly likely that a portion of the more than 1.2 mt of cocaine seized in Hong Kong, China during the past two years (HKNB 2012a) was likely destined for the Thai market.

Most of the ketamine (primarily in powder form)

Table 93. Seizures of pseudoephedrine preparations in Thailand, 2008-2011

Year	No. of cases	No. of tablets	Kg
2008	4	707,450	192.5
2009	12	1,908,700	0
2010	13	33,376,072	0
2011	8	9,626,820	0

Source(s): ONCB & NSB 2012

found in Thailand is trafficked from India (ONCB 2012a). A total of 150 kg of ketamine was seized from Indian air passenger couriers in 2010 and 25.8 kg was seized from Indian air passengers in 2011 (ONCB 2012c).

Significant quantities of precursor chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine have been trafficked through and from Thailand in recent years. Since 2008, nearly 46 million pharmaceutical decongestant tablets containing pseudoephedrine have been seized in Thailand. The tablets were destined for methamphetamine manufacture centres in Myanmar and Cambodia (ONCB 2011b). Pseudoephedrine traffickers have established networks in Thailand that enable substantial quantities of the substance to be purchased and smuggled to neighbouring countries (ONCB & NSB 2012). In addition, since 2008, tens of millions of pseudoephedrine tablets have been seized or disappeared from hospitals and pharmacies in Thailand. National controls aimed at restricting the availability of pharmaceutical pseudoephedrine came into effect in November 2011 (ONCB & NSB 2012).

In October 2011, Belgian Customs seized a consignment of 76 crates containing some 12,008 kg of safrole-rich oils² – enough to produce about 25 million ecstasy pills – from a cargo ship at the port in Antwerp. The safrole-rich oil, which was smuggled into Thailand from Lao PDR and likely originated in China, had been shipped from Laem Chabang port in Thailand. The shipment was intended for a company in the Netherlands (FPLO 2012).

² Safrole is a substance listed in Table 1 of the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988, as well as in Cambodia's Drug Law. The International Narcotics Control Board defines safrole-rich oils as being 'any mixtures or natural products containing safrole present in such a way that it can be used or recovered by readily applicable means' (INCB 2009).

Forensic data

Methamphetamine pills in Thailand typically weigh about 90 mg and contain 10 to 25% methamphetamine and 60 to 70% caffeine. In 2011, methamphetamine samples analysed in Thailand showed purities of 10 to 30% methamphetamine. Crystalline methamphetamine samples analysed in Thailand in 2011 were, on average, about 90% pure (ONCB 2012b).