

South Carolina: DEA Data Indicates Cocaine is the Number One Seized Drug by Law Enforcement Authorities



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This DEA Bulletin is based on preliminary reporting and may be subject to updating as additional information becomes available.

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Event: First Semi-Annual NFLIS Data Cocaine Update

As of October 2017, a review of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) data show that cocaine submissions indicate it is the number one seized substance by incident by law enforcement officials in South Carolina. The number of submissions has fluctuated with a high of 4,764 (in 2010) and a low of 3,492 (in 2012). The percent of cocaine submissions has declined every year since 2011 when compared to all South Carolina submissions.

(U) Figure 1. The National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS).

NFLIS is a DEA program that systematically collects drug chemistry analysis results, as well as other related information, from cases analyzed by participating state, local, and federal forensic laboratories. These laboratories analyze substances secured in law enforcement operations across the country. NFLIS data are used to support drug regulatory and scheduling efforts as well as to inform drug policy, drug enforcement, and health initiatives both nationally and in local communities.

Source: DEA

Significance: Cocaine Continues as the Number One Submitted Substance in South Carolina

Cocaine is the number one submitted drug by South Carolina law enforcement agencies, and the number of submissions is increasing slightly. However, the percentage of cocaine submissions as a part of all South Carolina lab submissions is decreasing. The amount of cocaine seizures is in line with national assessments that indicate cocaine availability is expected to increase as cocaine production from source countries increases and potentially drives down prices. Law enforcement agencies must remain vigilant for increased criminal activity related to cocaine.

If cocaine supplies increase in South Carolina, first responders, emergency departments, and the broader health community will likely encounter increases in treatment episodes and the need for appropriate response protocols—particularly when cocaine is mixed with other drugs and substances. A recent survey of 2017 laboratory submissions found that cocaine was being mixed with numerous other substances to include:

alprazolam, benzocaine, buspirone, caffeine, cannabis, codeine, dibutylone (beta-keto-N,N-dimethyl-1,3-benzodioxylbutanamine; bk-dmbdb), fentanyl, furanyl fentanyl, heroin, hydrocodone, hydromorphone, levamisole, methamphetamine, n-ethylpentylone, oxycodone, phenacetin, phenylimidothiazole isomer and salt undetermined, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) - non-specific, tramadol, U-47700, and 6-monoacetylmorphine.

Details: Cocaine Remains the Number One Seized Drug in South Carolina

DEA, along with state and local law enforcement partners, monitors cocaine trafficking throughout South Carolina with the primary focus on the metropolitan areas of Columbia, Florence, Charleston, and Greenville. Multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine are smuggled from Mexico. The dominant trafficking route for cocaine is via the Southwest Border to South Carolina using Atlanta, Charlotte, and Columbia as transshipment points. The cocaine is then redistributed throughout South Carolina.



Columbia-Area Trafficking

In the Columbia area, cocaine supply and availability have stabilized during the first half of 2017. Cocaine is available in the Columbia area with no shortages noted as in past periods. Cocaine abuse trends are also stable within the Columbia region. The primary trafficking routes for cocaine are from Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina to Columbia. Cocaine is typically wrapped tightly in many layers of cellophane with a covering of grease to avoid canine detection.

Florence-Area Trafficking

Cocaine was less popular during 2017 in the Florence area than in previous years, as heroin and opioid abuse is a broader threat. However, interdictions and seizures of cocaine have risen due to a steady demand. Mexico-based transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) continue to distribute cocaine and heroin primarily from the Southwest Border via Atlanta to Myrtle Beach and the surrounding areas. Additional sources of supply have been identified in Jamaica (Queens) and Buffalo, New York; and Los Angeles, California. The primary routes/methods used to transport cocaine in the Florence area are via commercial trucks, passenger vehicles, and mail/package service companies. Many DTOs continue to use the “spoke and wheel” concept whereby regional distributors of cocaine are based in Atlanta and then transport drugs to the area via passenger vehicles. Other Mexican based TCOs use commercial vehicles (tractor-trailers) to transport kilogram-quantities to the area. Finally, some traffickers use mail/package services to ship kilogram-quantities of cocaine from

Southern California. Local gangs have been identified as the local distributors. Bulk cocaine is sold in gram to half-kilogram quantities in plastic bags. Crack cocaine continues to be popular among drug users in the Florence area. Once bulk cocaine arrives locally, local distributors convert it to crack cocaine. In addition, crack cocaine and heroin are distributed together.

Charleston-Area Trafficking

There is a steady supply of cocaine in the Charleston area. Cocaine is trafficked to Charleston and the surrounding low country areas via vehicles with hidden compartments. Many of these trafficking organizations have ties to Mexican TCOs with contacts in California, Atlanta, and Houston. The primary method of trafficking cocaine is by private vehicles; flatbed trailers pulled by pickup trucks; as well as tractor-trailers. These vehicles travel along Interstates 20, 26, and 95 into Charleston and south into the South Carolina counties of Jasper and Hampton. Many vehicles are rented. Kilogram-quantities of cocaine are wrapped in clear plastic and duct tape and may be smeared with grease or similar masking agents to prevent law enforcement detection. Some cocaine is then converted into crack cocaine. This process is completed primarily by local distributors who purchase bulk cocaine and then convert it themselves. Crack cocaine is packaged in clear plastic baggies.

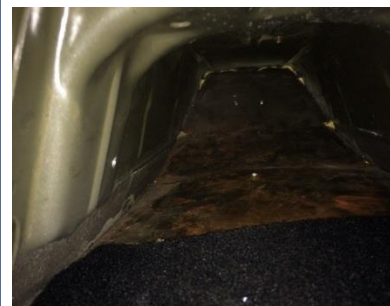
Greenville-Area Trafficking

The Greenville area has a steady and stable cocaine supply. Cocaine enters the Greenville area via Interstate 85 in commercial and passenger vehicles. Some of the vehicles use hidden compartments. Cocaine abuse is widespread but stable. Bulk cocaine is usually packaged in plastic and taped. Bulk powder cocaine is transported along traditional routes to the local area and “rocked” or “cooked-up” by street-level dealers and packaged in plastic. Crack sales are prevalent in economically depressed areas of the Greenville.

The NFLIS Data for South Carolina

Information in Figure 4 is based upon NFLIS reporting, and illustrates analyzed cocaine seizures from South Carolina from 2010 to 2017. South Carolina cocaine laboratory submissions are ranked first among all South Carolina laboratory submissions. The percent of all South Carolina laboratory submissions has declined every year since 2011. Seizures from 2016 and 2017 (January through June) are expected to increase as crime laboratories work through backlogged seizures.

(U) Figure 3. Cocaine and weapons seized from vehicle trap during South Carolina investigation.



Source: DEA

(U) Figure 4. Cocaine Ranking South Carolina 2010-2017* **

Calendar Year	Ranking	Lab Submissions	Percent of All Submissions
2010	1	4,764	50.62
2011	1	3,840	52.62
2012	1	3,492	32.59
2013	1	3,881	29.33
2014	1	3,879	24.56
2015	1	4,225	23.81
2016*	1	4,227	23.63
2017**	2	1,082	21.68

*additional submissions pending. **additional submissions pending (Jan – Jun).

SOURCE: National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS); <https://www.nflis.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/>; October 10, 2017.

(U) This product was prepared by the DEA Atlanta Field Division Office. Comments and questions may be addressed to the Chief, Analysis and Production Section at dea.onsi@usdoj.gov. For media/press inquiries call (202) 307-7977.