

Narcotics Assistance Fact Sheet

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U.S. Embassy, Bangkok Thailand



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The U.S. Government provides a wide range of assistance to the Government and people of Thailand to help combat the scourge of illegal drugs. Several U.S. agencies in the Embassy are actively engaged in programs to interdict the flow of drugs into Thailand, assist Thai authorities in prosecuting offenders, improve public understanding of the drug threat, and provide rehabilitation and treatment for drug users. Historically our efforts have been aimed at preventing the flow of heroin from the Golden Triangle into the United States, but in recent years our focus has broadened to include the growing methamphetamine threat as well, since U.S. and Thai officials have a common interest in controlling both drugs.

The **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)** has operated in Thailand for over 30 years. Its Bangkok Country Office cooperates closely with Thai law enforcement agencies to interdict the flow of drugs and provides financial assistance to defray many operational expenses. DEA works closely with the Royal Thai Police Narcotics Suppression Board (PNSB), the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), the Border Patrol Police (BPP), Provincial Police, Marine Police, Royal Thai Customs and Royal Thai Immigration.

In September 1998, DEA inaugurated its Vetted Unit Program. To qualify for this program, Thai law enforcement professionals were hand-selected through a rigorous testing program; they were then given extensive training in the United States. Today more than one hundred vetted law enforcement personnel are operating in units in northern Thailand, Bangkok and southern Thailand, where they target heroin and methamphetamine networks and traffickers. In addition to training, the U.S. Government also assumes a significant role in equipping the vetted units it sponsors.

The DEA has assisted the Thai Government in establishing narcotics intelligence centers in Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Songkhla. DEA conducts a variety of instructional programs designed to enhance counter-drug expertise, in Thailand and throughout the region. It also manages a number of special programs in Thailand, including:

- *OPERATION BANGKOK EXPRESS*, which targets couriers smuggling illicit drugs aboard international flights out of Don Muang International Airport.
- *OPERATION LANNA*, which targets and monitors northern jungle trails used by Burmese drug smugglers.
- *OPERATION ASIAN ALCHEMY*, which identifies Thai-based chemical companies that are diverting precursor chemicals used in heroin and methamphetamine production.
- *OPERATION I-SARN*, which is aimed at countering the trafficking of illicit drugs from Laos into Thailand.

The Bangkok Country Office also assists the Royal Thai Police in initiating and expanding the DARE Program, a community-based anti-drug education program.

The Embassy's **Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS)** has provided over \$76 million in counter-narcotics assistance for Thailand since 1974. The NAS budget for fiscal year 2000 is \$4.4 million. Using funding provided by the Department of State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), NAS has supported the Royal Thai Government (RTG) in building its counter-drug capacity in many ways. NAS programs are developed in close collaboration with the Thai Government through the ONCB. NAS currently assists the Thai Government in four major program areas:

Crop Control and Opium Eradication. NAS provides per diem, fuel and logistical support costs for the Royal Thai Army's annual eradication program, plus technical assistance to the ONCB's crop survey office in Chiang Mai. NAS also supports preventive patrol activities, small civic action projects in opium-growing villages, and specialized training. NAS is a long-time contributor to the Royal Project, which fosters development and alternatives to opium production in the North.

Demand Reduction. NAS helps fund RTG and NGO demand reduction training and anti-drug community outreach throughout Thailand. NAS supports drug prevention studies in selected hill tribe villages and provides a variety of small grants at the community level. NAS is also assisting with the establishment of a nationwide drug surveillance system under the leadership of ONCB and Chulalongkorn University's Institute of Health Research.

Law Enforcement. NAS assists a variety of Thai institutions in capacity building for targeting significant traffickers. Training, equipment and improved coordination are provided to programs in investigation, intelligence and developing the criminal justice system. NAS provides vehicles, computers and communications equipment for the Royal Thai Police (RTP) and ONCB and is helping upgrade the ONCB central narcotics and crime database. NAS assists the new Money Laundering Control Office with in-country training and various commodities. It supports the ONCB, the Attorney General's Office and the Judiciary in developing new legal mechanisms to control transnational organized crime, including helping draft and update legislation for legal mechanisms such as legal wiretaps, witness protection, and extradition.

Regional Activities. NAS funding supports the International Law Enforcement Academy, described below, with grants of approximately \$1.5 million per year. In addition, NAS supports RTG regional outreach by funding a variety of regional meetings, workshops and training.

US-Thai Demand Reduction Collaboration. INL has provided \$200,000 to fund a major new initiative to improve Thailand's capacity to respond to the current methamphetamine epidemic. In May 2000 a team of U.S. addiction treatment experts

visited Bangkok for a workshop initiating the Collaboration, which will focus on prevention and treatment of substance abuse and advanced professional development for counselors and physicians. The U.S. team will work with the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, ONCB, public health facilities, universities and private hospitals to develop a training program for over 2,500 Thai professionals on medical management, counseling, prevention, and problem solving related to amphetamine addiction and substance abuse. Pilot treatment programs based on the Matrix Model for Stimulant Treatment, a 16-week intensive outpatient program, will be developed around the country. The project will include ongoing bilateral exchanges between Thai and U.S. professionals, both here and in the U.S. The participants have also discussed developing an Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) for Thailand modeled on the Centers supported in the U.S. by the Department of Health and Human Services.

The **International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA)** was established in late 1998 to enhance the effectiveness of regional cooperation against transnational crime in Southeast Asia, especially illicit drug trafficking, financial crimes, and alien smuggling. This is a joint Thai-U.S. institution. The U.S. contributed \$4.5 million in 1998 and 1999, and now provides over \$1.5 million annually in operating funds. Thailand provides a world-class training facility, and the two countries exercise joint oversight through a binational steering committee. Since March 1999, ILEA has trained over 1,000 criminal justice professionals from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, China, Laos, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Macao. ILEA has a broad and constantly expanding curriculum, with particular emphasis on counter-narcotics; among the subjects covered in depth are drug trafficking trends, management of sources, criminal surveillance operations, undercover operations, drug identification and evidence handling, precursor control, clandestine laboratory investigations, and controlled deliveries.

The **Joint Interagency Task Force-West (JIATF-W)** is a joint U.S. military task force based in Alameda, California which supervises and organizes the efforts of all major U.S. military commands in counter-narcotics work. JIATF-W conducts an intensive program of training exercises for the Thai police. Since 1997, over 700 police from the Narcotics Special Branch, Border Patrol Police and ONCB in Bangkok, Udorn, Chiang Mai and Songkhla have received training in subjects such as firearms, marksmanship, patrolling, operational planning, surveillance, photography, small unit tactics and advanced medical training. JIATF-W also directs a practical exercise as part of every session of ILEA's basic Supervisory Criminal Investigator Course, and has helped renovate the police facility that will soon house ILEA on a permanent basis.

The **U.S. Customs Attaché** in Bangkok works closely with DEA to interdict drugs being smuggled out of Thailand through the airport and the postal system. Customs has trained the Thai Police in the use of an innovative narcotics detection system called the "Buster Kit," which has been put to good use in border highway checkpoint operations. This has led to several seizures, including a first-ever discovery of methamphetamine tablets hidden in a vehicle's gasoline tank.

The **Federal Bureau of Investigation**, through its **Legal Attaché Office** in the Embassy, works closely with DEA in coordinating drug and organized crime investigations in Thailand. The FBI uses its extensive connections with Interpol and third country police forces to pursue international aspects of narcotics investigations, which often also involve other crimes such as alien smuggling, money laundering, illegal gambling, public corruption, white collar crime, etc. FBI instructors provide extensive training at ILEA, and 93 Royal Thai Police officers have graduated from the 11-week law enforcement training sessions at the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia.

American **Peace Corps Volunteers** working in remote areas of Thailand regularly include counter-narcotics instruction as part of the “health and life skills” training they provide to primary school students.

The Embassy’s **Public Affairs (PA) Section** has conducted a series of Professional-in-Residence programs since 1997, bringing U.S. legal experts to Thailand for several weeks each to advise the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General. They also present Digital Video Conferences with U.S. experts and conduct seminars. All these programs are aimed at judicial and criminal justice reform, which is needed in the long term for successful prosecution of narcotics offenders. They cover subjects such as plea-bargaining, money laundering, criminal case management, extradition and use of evidence. An outstanding recent example was the visit of Judge Sterling Johnson, who advised Thai ministries on the enforcement of narcotics control legislation.

PA recently hosted a series of seminars with Michael Rosati, a scientist and expert in drug prevention education programs, for the Public Relations Department, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Health and Chiang Mai University. His focus is on helping Thai officials develop drug prevention programs for use by media, community and the government.

The Embassy’s **Consular Section** has cooperated closely with the Thai Government on the extradition of fugitives. Since the U.S.-Thai bilateral extradition treaty entered into force on May 17, 1991, we have collaborated on 121 extraditions to both our countries. 64% of these cases were drug-related. DEA’s Operation Tiger Trap, one of the most outstanding examples of Thai-U.S. cooperation, resulted in the extradition to the U.S. of 14 major fugitives between 1996 and 1999. The Embassy has submitted provisional arrest requests for 7 additional individuals targeted in Operation Tiger Trap; these cases will remain open until the subjects are apprehended. At present we are working on four additional active cases involving heroin traffickers, whom we hope to extradite to the U.S. as soon as formalities can be completed.