



COLLABORATING TO FIGHT DRUG CRIME: MULTI-JURISTICTIONAL TASK FORCES

A Profile of the Vermilion County Metropolitan Enforcement Group



Collaborating to fight drug crime: Profile of the Vermilion County Metropolitan Enforcement Group

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Introduction

Drug task forces were developed to more efficiently and effectively fight proliferation of illicit drugs. Local police have jurisdictional restraints making it difficult to combat drug markets extending through multiple cities, and counties (Smith, Novak, Frank, & Travis, 2000). Drug task forces work across jurisdictions and pool resources, knowledge, and personnel. MEGs and task forces are staffed by officers representing federal, state, county, and local police agencies. Drug task force officers work undercover, using confidential sources, to purchase drugs in order to gather the intelligence to make arrests (Reichert, 2012).

There are two kinds of drug task forces that operate in Illinois—metropolitan enforcement groups (MEG) and multi-jurisdictional drug task forces.

MEGs have been in existence in Illinois since the 1970's through the Intergovernmental Drug Enforcement Act [30 *ILCS* 715/1]. MEG policy boards engage in an active, formal role in the management of operations. MEG policy boards are required to include an elected official and the chief law enforcement officer, or their designees, from each participating unit of government. An elected official from one of the participating agencies must be designated to act as financial officer of the MEG to receive operational funds. MEG operations are limited to the enforcement of drug laws and delineated weapons offenses and the investigation of street gang-related crimes.

Multi-jurisdictional drug task forces began in the 1980's using the organizational authority from the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act [5 *ILCS* 220/1]. Task force policy boards are not governed by legislated structure or composition requirements or restricted by statute in their scope of operations.

Drug use in Illinois

According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 718,000 Illinois adults used illicit drugs in the past month and 547,000 used marijuana in the past month in 2009. The University of Illinois' 2010 Youth Study on Substance Use interviewed 5,590 Illinois students and found marijuana was used by 25 percent of 12th graders, but less than 6 percent reported using illicit drugs. A majority (78 percent) of arrestees booked into Cook County Jail tested positive for drugs based on the 2010 Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program (ADAM).

According to SAMHSA, an estimated 757,000 Illinois adults had an illicit drug or alcohol abuse dependence problem in the past year and 927,000 needed, but did not receive, treatment. According to the Illinois Department of Human Services' Department of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, in 2009, there were 91,891 admissions in Illinois for substance abuse treatment—a rate of 712 per 100,000 people. There were 60,501 admissions for treatment for illicit drugs—a rate of 469 per 100,000 people. According to the data, admissions are at the lowest rate in ten years due in part to funding cuts for state-funded substance abuse treatment. According to SAMHSA's Drug Abuse Warning Network, in 2009 there were 790 drug-related

deaths reported in nine northern Illinois counties, a rate of nine deaths per 100,000.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2007, the rate of unintentional drug overdoses was nine per 100,000 persons or 1,094 overdoses.

Combating Illinois drug crime

The transportation and sale of drugs is a significant problem in Illinois. Illinois is classified as a “High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area” by the Office of the National Drug Control Policy (2010). The city of Chicago is a major transshipment and distribution center for drugs in the Midwest due in part to its central location in the U.S. In addition, there are extensive transportation options to and from the city—trains, highways, airports (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2001). From Chicago, smaller quantities are distributed to neighboring states (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2001).

Drug task forces combat drug markets and the supply of drugs through supply reduction techniques (Olson, 2004). Supply reduction involves crop eradication, interdiction, reducing drug production and cultivation, seizing large numbers of drugs and assets, conducting systematic investigations, interrupting supply lines, and prosecuting drug organizations, suppliers, and distributors (Moore, 1990). The other technique to fight drug crime is demand reduction which includes drug prevention, deterrence, and treatment. Some law enforcement departments use the demand reduction program, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) (Olson, 2004).

Drug task force evaluation

While there is an abundance of anecdotal evidence to prove the effectiveness of multi-jurisdictional drug task forces, little empirical knowledge on the success of the task forces exists and they cannot be classified at this time as an evidence-based practice. Researchers debate the most appropriate way to evaluate the effectiveness of drug task forces (Smith et al., 2000). Since it is not possible to differentiate between the impact of drug task forces and other measures, they are difficult to evaluate (Olson, Albertson, Brees, Cobb, Feliciano, Juergens, Ramker, and Bauer, 2002).

A common measure of success of drug task forces is the number of arrests made. However, drug task forces tend to have lower arrest rates than local police departments and target different offenses. Drug task forces attempt to remove fewer higher-level distributors rather than a large number of low-level offenders and users (Olson, 2004). Drug task forces tend to focus on violations of Illinois’ Controlled Substances Act (involving cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine) and local police department arrests focus on cannabis-related offenses (Olson et. al., 2002).

Official drug arrest data is an unreliable source to measure success of drug task forces. Drug task force arrests involve multiple police departments and local jurisdictions. Therefore, arrests reported to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) data system may not accurately reflect

¹ Illinois Counties participating in DAWN include Grundy, DuPage, DeKalb, Cook, Will, McHenry, Lake, Kendall, and Kane.

which agency—drug task force or local police—made the arrest (Olson, 2004). Drug crimes may be over-reported when more than one department reports the same arrest or may be under-reported or never reported (Olson, 2004).

Drug task force profiles

Periodically, the ICJIA profiles Illinois MEGs and task forces to provide a general overview of the drug crime problems in the various jurisdictions and share responses to these problems. These profiles can provide information to MEG and task force directors and policy board members to guide decision-making and the allocation of resources. All current and previous profiles can be accessed on the ICJIA’s website: <http://www.icjia.state.il.us>.

This profile focuses on the Vermilion County Metropolitan Enforcement Group (VMEG), which covers Vermilion County with an estimated total population of 8,625 in 2010. In 2010, 2 local police agencies participated in VMEG. This is the only narcotics unit serving Vermilion County. A participating agency is defined as one that contributes either personnel or financial resources to the task force. Eight officers and two support personnel were assigned to VMEG in 2010, four of the officers were assigned by participating agencies and four from the Illinois State Police (ISP). These officers are dedicated full-time to the task force and work out of a central task force office.

ICJIA-funded drug task forces

ICJIA is designated as the State Administering Agency of many federal funds including Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grants which fund MEGs and task forces. For more than 20 years the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) has been awarding federal funding to local law enforcement agencies to support drug task forces. Federal grants awarded to drug task forces pay for personnel, equipment, commodities, travel, vehicle maintenance, and communications. In 2011, the ICJIA funded 19 of 22 multi-jurisdictional drug task forces in Illinois (*Map 1*). The three other drug task forces receive the majority of their funding through the Illinois State Police.

Table 1 indicates the amount of federal funds allocated by the ICJIA to VMEG from federal fiscal year (FFY) 2007 to 2011. During the past five FFYs, the award amount has remained stable at \$143,581.

Table 1
VMEG grant totals

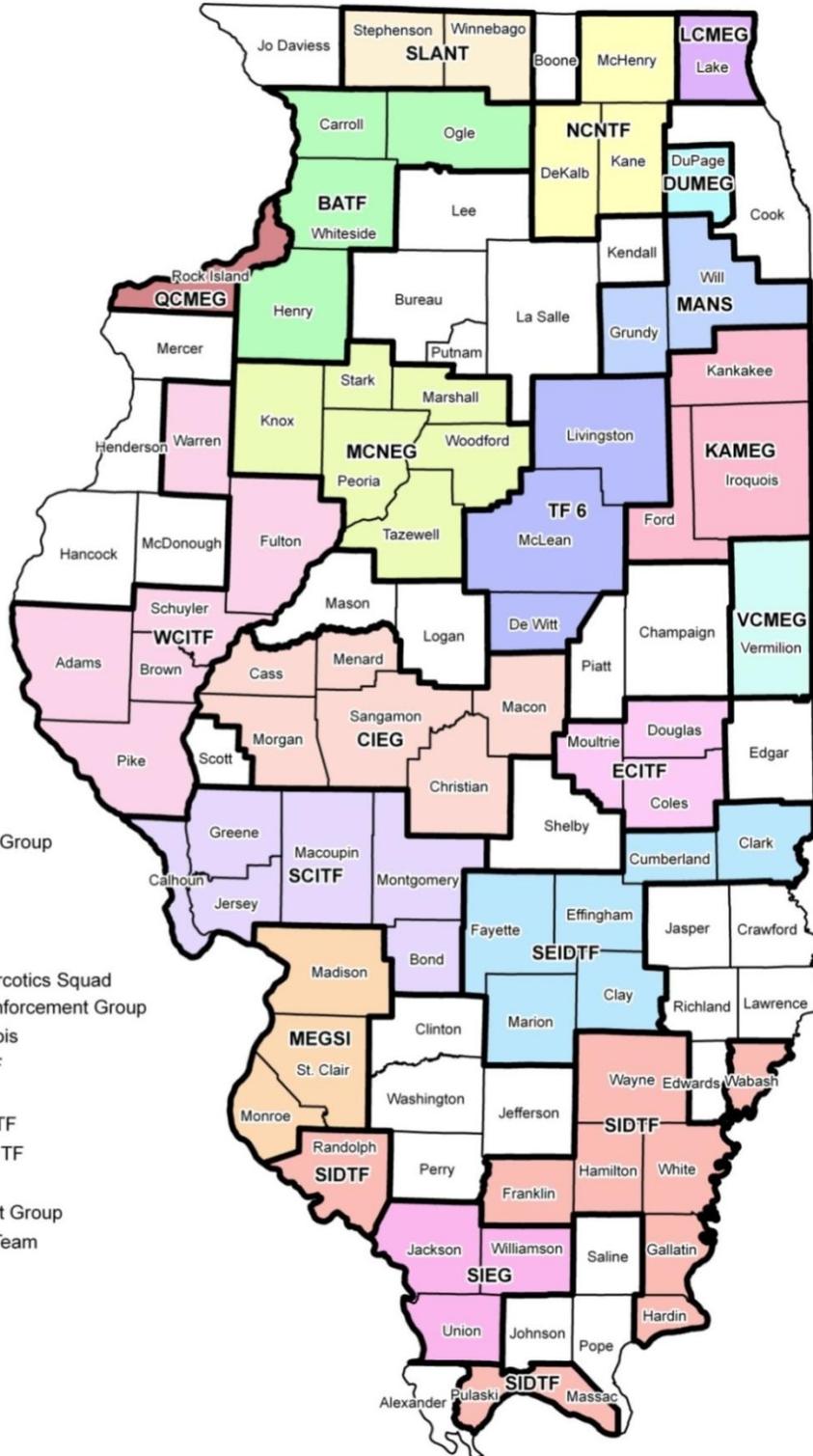
Federal fiscal year	Grant Amount
2007	\$143,581
2008	\$143,581
2009	\$143,581
2010	\$143,581
2011	\$143,581

Map 1

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority-funded MEGs and drug task forces, 2011

ICJIA-funded MEGS & TFs

- BATF - Blackhawk Area TF
- CIEG - Central Illinois Enforcement Group
- DUMEG - DuPage MEG
- ECITF - East Central Illinois TF
- KAMEG - Kankakee MEG
- LCMEG - Lake County MEG
- MANS - Joliet Metropolitan Area Narcotics Squad
- MCNEG - Multi-County Narcotics Enforcement Group
- MEGSI - MEG of Southwestern Illinois
- NCNTF - North Central Narcotics TF
- QCMEG - Quad Cities MEG
- SCITF - South Central Illinois Drug TF
- SEIDTF - Southeastern Illinois Drug TF
- SIDTF - Southern Illinois Drug TF
- SIEG - Southern Illinois Enforcement Group
- SLANT - State Line Area Narcotics Team
- TF 6 - Task Force 6
- VCMEG - Vermillion County MEG
- WCITF - West Central Illinois TF



Drug arrest trends

Drug offenses in Illinois

The majority of drug offenses in Illinois are violations of either the *Cannabis Control Act* [720 ILCS 550], which prohibits the possession, sale and cultivation of marijuana, or the *Controlled Substances Act* [720 ILCS 570], which prohibits the possession, sale, distribution or manufacture of all other drugs deemed to have a high potential for abuse, including cocaine, hallucinogens, and opiates. Other Illinois laws to fight drug-related activity include the *Hypodermic Syringes and Needles Act* [720 ILCS 635], which prohibits the possession or sale of hypodermic instruments, and the *Drug Paraphernalia Control Act* [720 ILCS 600/3], which prohibits the possession, sale, or delivery of drug paraphernalia.

Violations of the *Illinois Controlled Substances Act* are considered to be the most serious, since they are mostly classified under Illinois law as felonies due to the dangerous nature of the drugs involved. Felony offenses carry prison sentences of one year or more. The majority of cannabis and drug paraphernalia offenses encountered by police, on the other hand, tend to be classified under Illinois law as misdemeanors, which typically carry jail terms of less than a year.

Drug data sources

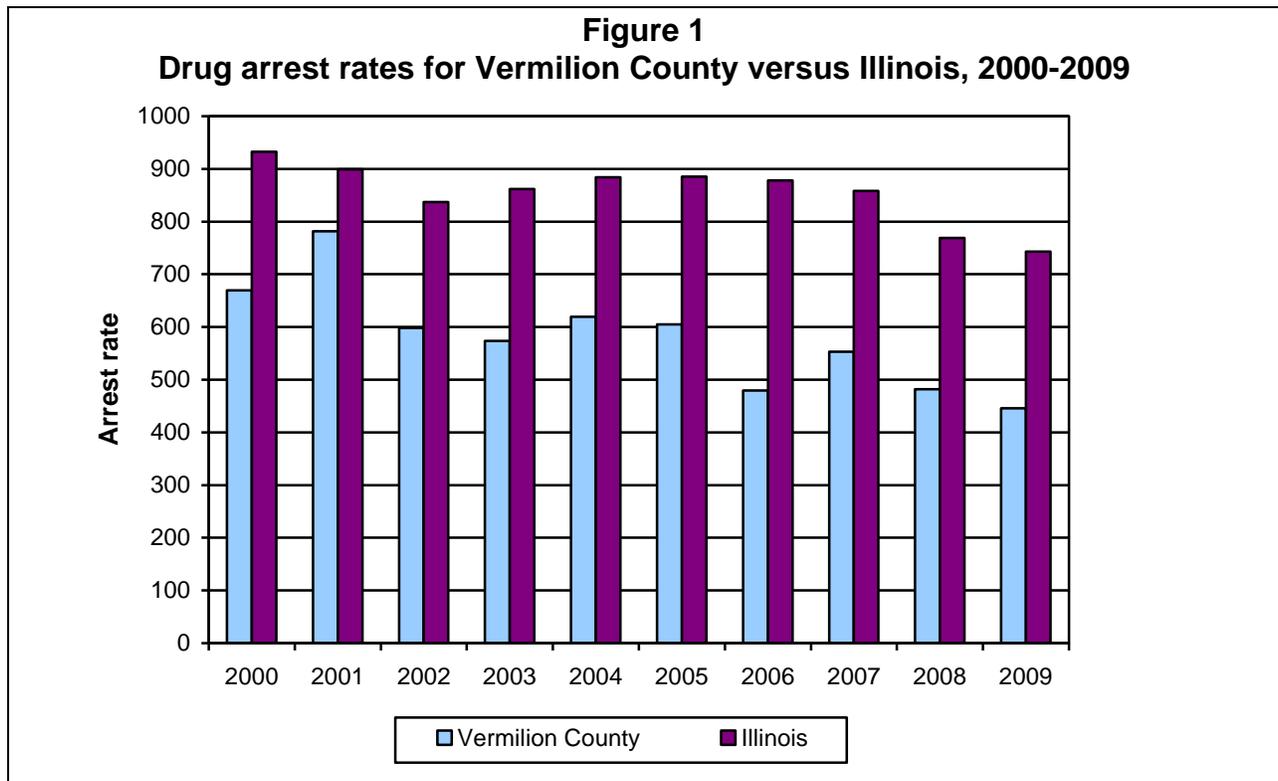
Two sources of drug arrest data are presented in this section: 1) quarterly data reports for the period 2002-2011 submitted by Vermilion County Metropolitan Enforcement Group (VMEG) to the ICJIA as a grant requirement; and 2) drug arrest statistics for 2002-2011 derived from criminal history record information (CHRI) submitted by law enforcement agencies in Vermilion County to the Illinois State at the time of arrest, including those made by both VMEG and non-VMEG officers.

Through a cooperative agreement with the Illinois State Police (ISP), the ICJIA has established an in-house computer linkage to certain elements of the state's Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) System, which is the central repository for offenders' arrest and conviction history. The ICJIA is able to derive statistical information on arrests for specific charges and agencies from these data which are directly comparable to arrests reported by VMEG. The CHRI data were used to obtain the number of drug arrest for all law enforcement agencies in Vermilion County from 2002-2011, from which VMEG arrests could be subtracted to create non-MEG comparative drug arrest statistics.

Subclasses of drug arrests, for example, felonies versus misdemeanors, cannabis versus controlled substance, delivery versus possession, and detailed offense classes, may not add up to the broader drug arrest totals due to reporting omissions and inconsistencies.

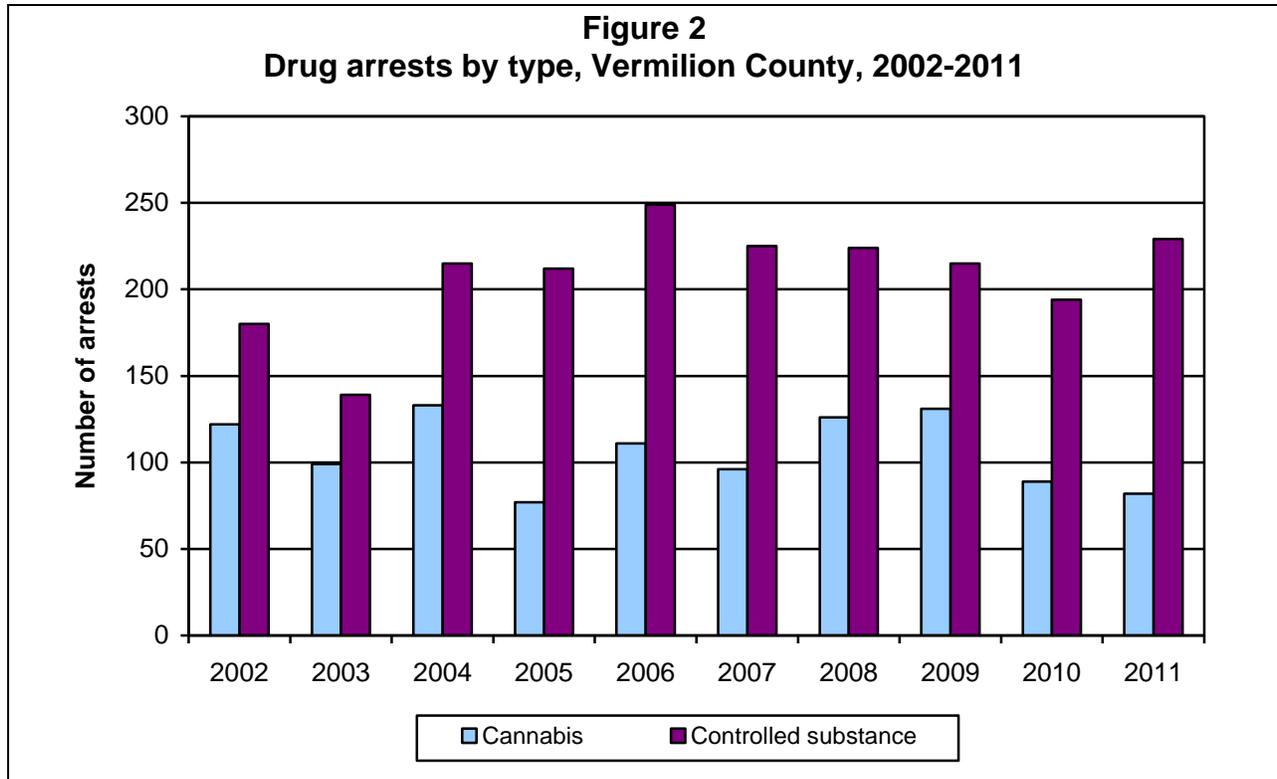
Drug arrests

From 2000 to 2009, the drug arrest rate for Illinois decreased 20 percent from 932 arrests per 100,000 population to 743 arrests per 100,000. During the same time period, the drug arrest rate for Vermilion County decreased 33 percent, from 669 arrests per 100,000 population to 446 arrests per 100,000 population (*Figure 1*).



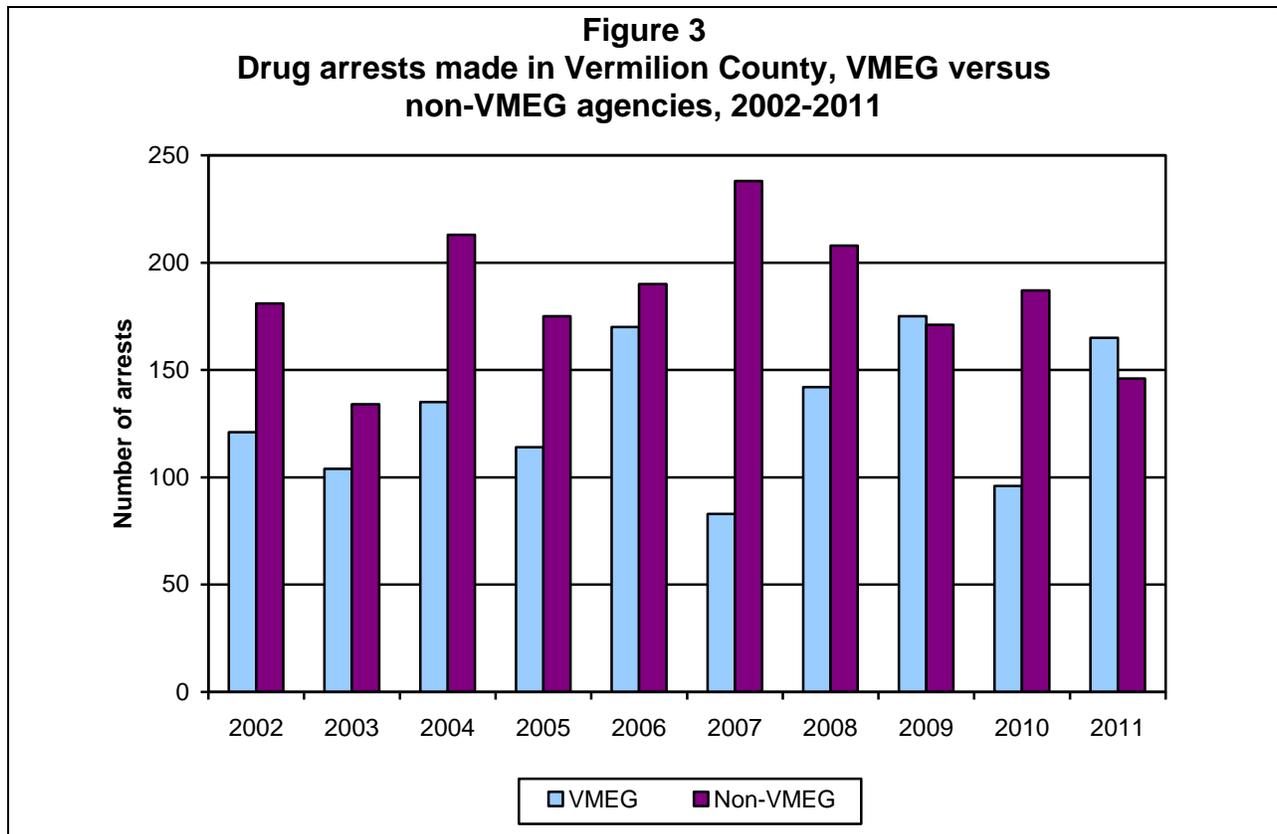
Source: Illinois State Police

From 2002 to 2011, the number of drug arrests for cannabis and controlled substances reported in the CHRI data in Vermilion County increased. This includes arrests made by all law enforcement officers—both VMEG and non-VMEG. Violations of controlled substance accounted for more drug arrests in the county than violations of cannabis. *Figure 2* depicts the drug arrests by type in Vermilion County from 2002 to 2011. The number of cannabis drug arrests in Vermilion County decreased from 122 in 2002 to 82 in 2011, and the number of controlled substance arrests increased from 180 in 2002 to 229 in 2011.



Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA

Using CHRI data, it was possible to isolate non-VMEG drug arrests by subtracting drug arrests reported by VMEG from the total arrests in CHRI for Vermilion County, as both appear in CHRI through the fingerprinting process at booking. *Figure 3* shows the number of drug arrests made each year by VMEG officers and non-VMEG agencies from 2002 to 2011. In Vermilion County, the number of drug arrests made by non-VMEG agencies decreased from 181 in 2002 to 146 arrests in 2011. The number of drug arrests made by VMEG shows an increase from 121 arrests in 2002 to 165 arrests in 2011.

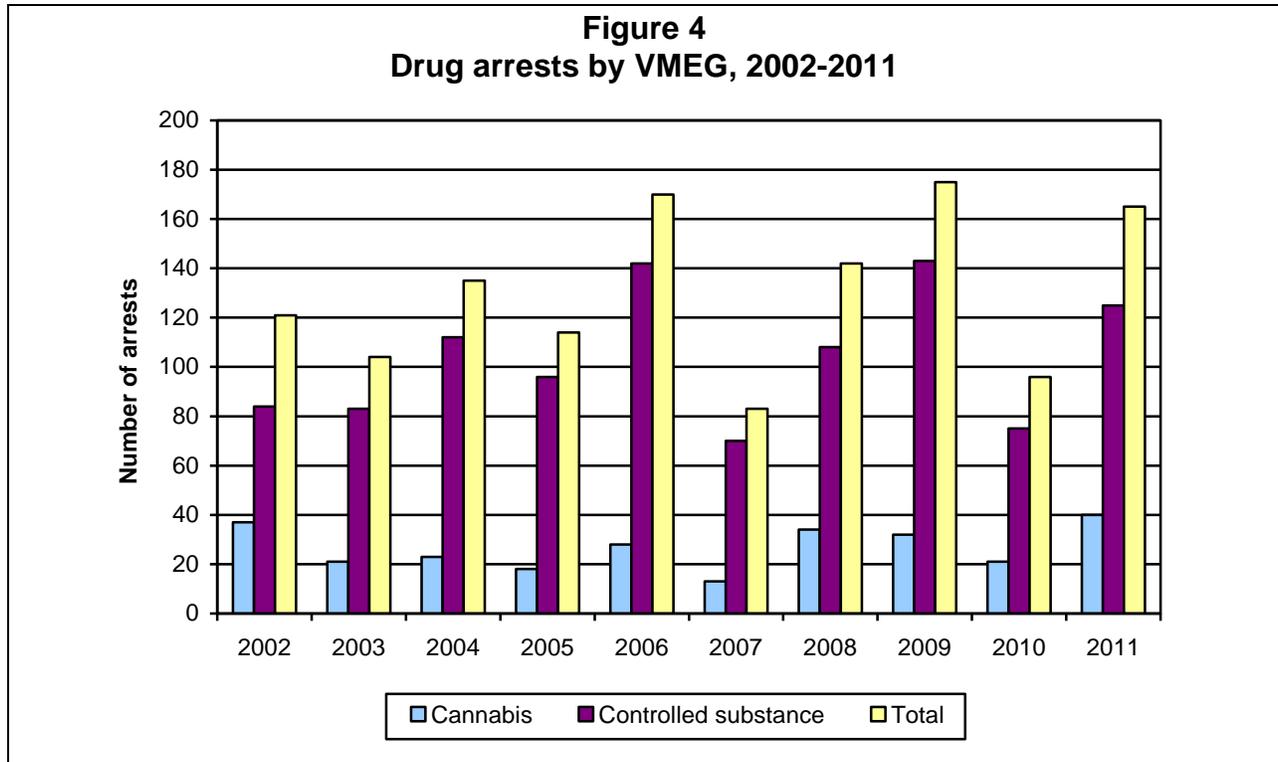


Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA; VMEG data reports submitted to ICJIA

In 2011, there were 261 felony drug arrests made in Vermilion County. VMEG reported that they made 150 felony drug arrests in 2011. Assuming that the majority, if not all, of VMEG arrests were made within Vermilion County, then 57 percent, were made by VMEG. VMEG also made approximately 30 percent or 15 of the 50, misdemeanor arrests in Vermilion County. In total, then, the eight officers assigned to VMEG—four from local agencies and four ISP officers—made 165 drug arrests or approximately 21 drug arrests per officer. In Vermilion County, the 122 full time sworn officers made approximately 146 drug arrests or 1.2 arrests per officer².

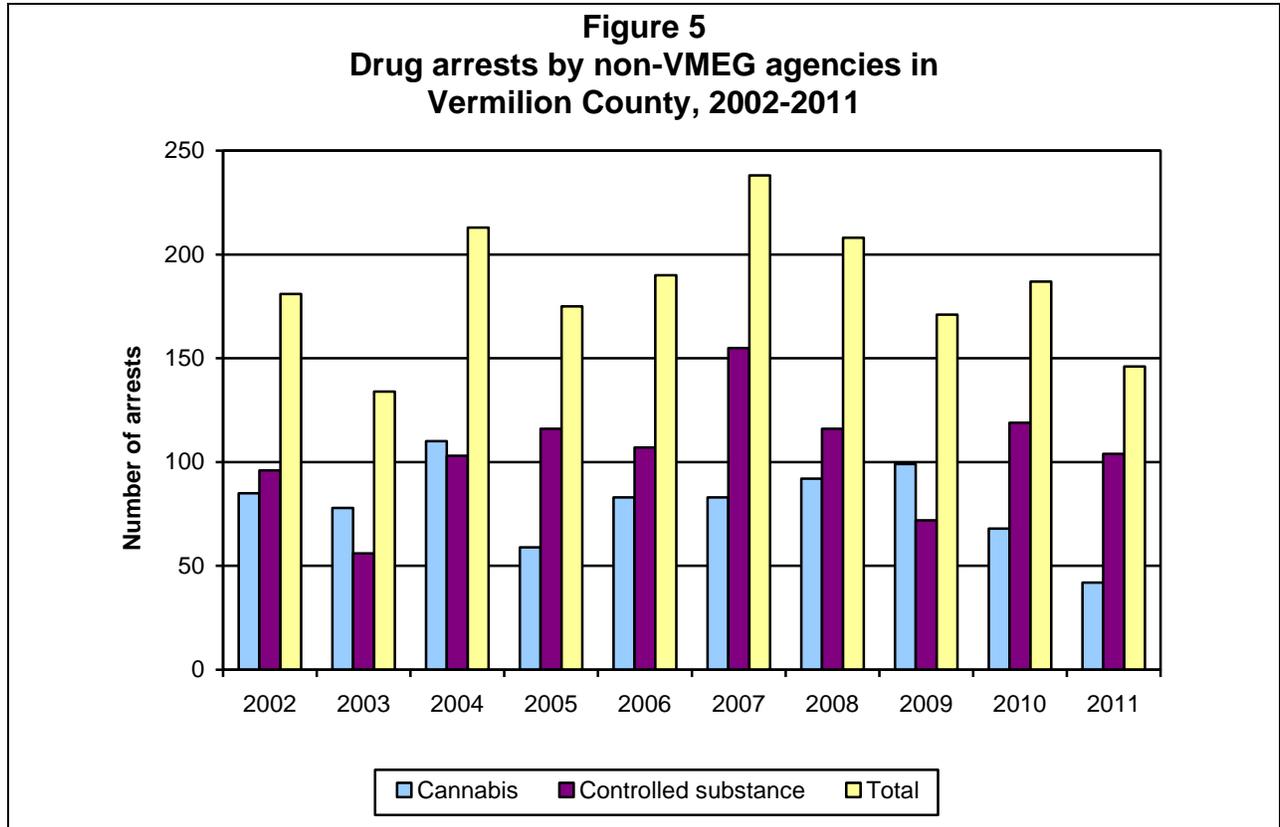
² Please note that the main focus of VMEG officers is drug arrests. Non-task force law enforcement officers within Vermilion County handle all criminal cases and arrests within the county and are not focused solely on drug cases.

From 2002 to 2011, the number of cannabis and controlled substances arrests made by VMEG and reported to the ICJIA increased 36 percent, from 121 to 165. Violations of the *Controlled Substances Act* accounted for more drug arrests made by VMEG throughout the period analyzed than violations of the *Cannabis Control Act*. From 2002 to 2011, arrests for violations of the *Controlled Substances Act* increased nearly 50 percent, from 84 to 125, while the number of VMEG arrests for violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* increased eight percent, from 37 to 40 (Figure 4).



Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

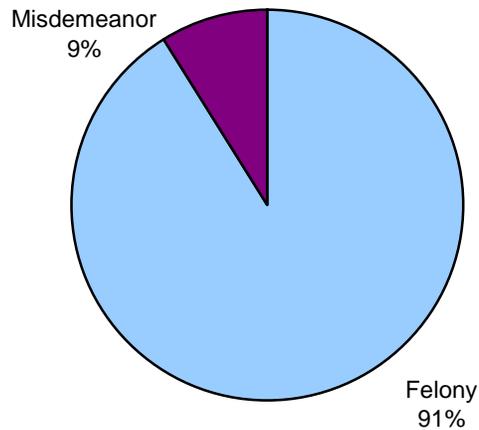
Figure 5 presents the number of cannabis and controlled substances arrests made by non-VMEG agencies in Vermilion County during the period 2002 to 2011. From 2002 to 2011, the number of cannabis and controlled substances arrests made by non-VMEG agencies decreased nearly 20 percent, from 181 to 146. Violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* accounted for fewer drug arrests made by non-VMEG agencies throughout most of the period analyzed than violations of the *Controlled Substance Act*. From 2002 to 2011, arrests for violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* decreased 51 percent, from 85 to 42, while the number of non-VMEG agency arrests for violations of the *Controlled Substances Act* increased from 96 to 104.



Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA

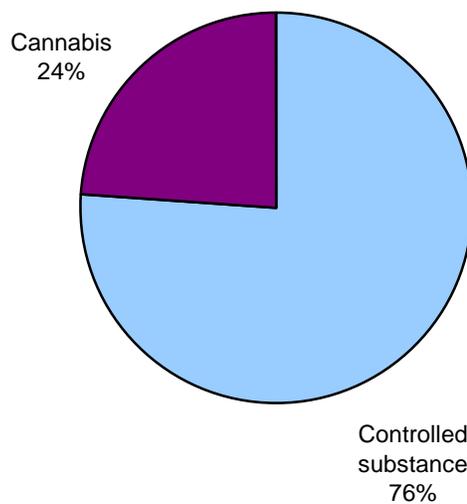
In 2011, 76 percent of the drug arrests made by VMEG were for violations of the *Controlled Substances Act*, compared to 69 percent in 2002. In 2011, 91 percent of drug arrests made by VMEG were felonies, while 9 percent were misdemeanor arrests (*Figure 6* and *Figure 7*).

Figure 6
Percent of VMEG arrests in Vermilion County by offense type, 2011



Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

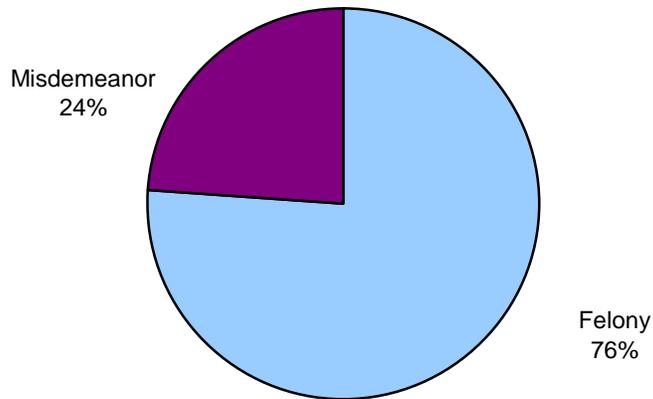
Figure 7
Percent of VMEG arrests in Vermilion County by violation type, 2011



Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

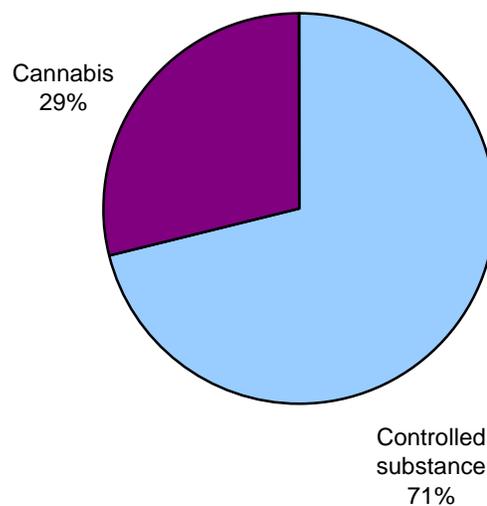
In contrast to VMEG drug arrests, approximately 76 percent of drug arrests made by non-VMEG agencies in Vermilion County in 2011 were felonies and approximately 24 percent were misdemeanor arrests. In 2011, 29 percent of the drug arrests made by non-VMEG agencies were for violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* (Figure 8 and 9).

Figure 8
Percent of non-VMEG arrests in Vermilion County by offense type, 2011



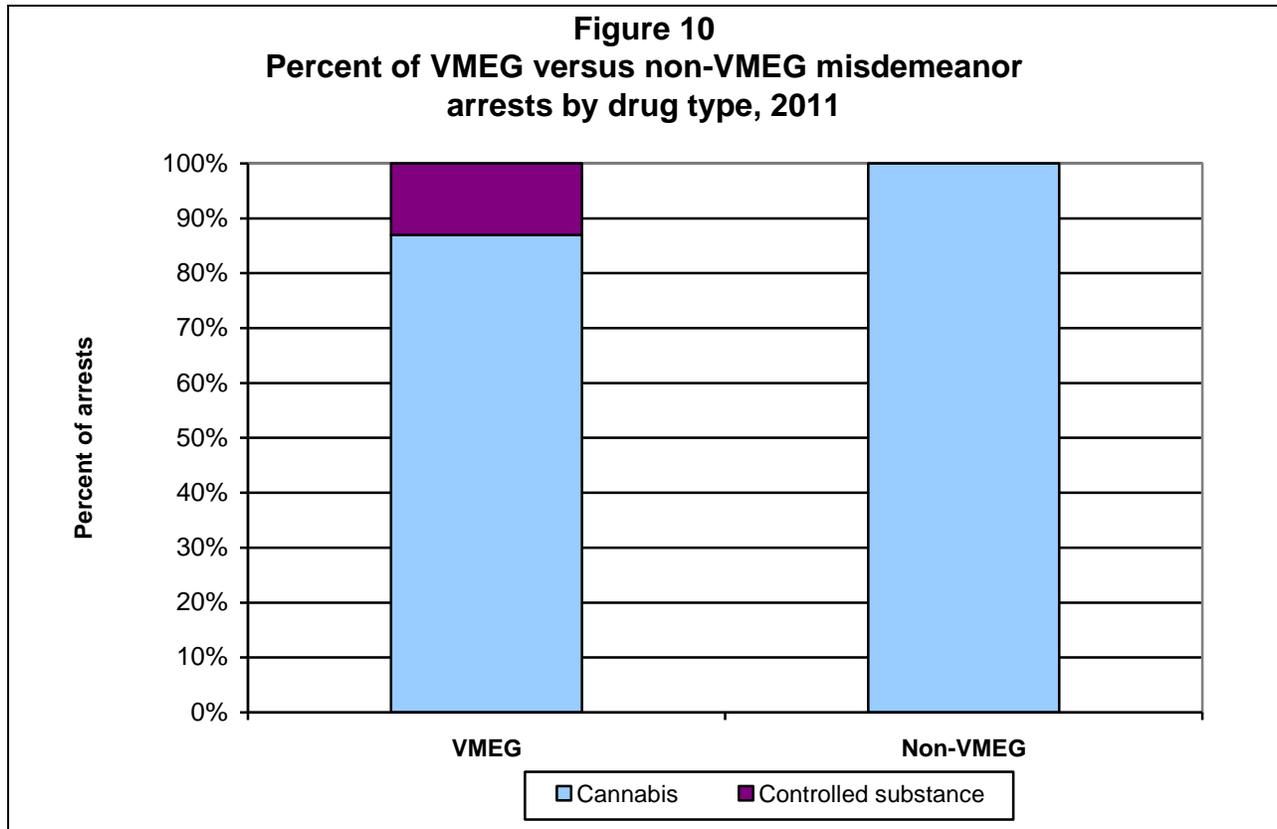
Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA

Figure 9
Percent of non-VMEG arrests in Vermilion County by violation type, 2011



Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA

In 2011, VMEG made 15 misdemeanor arrests. Of those arrests, 87 percent were for violations of the *Cannabis Control Act*. During the same time period, non-VMEG agencies made 35 misdemeanor arrests, with 100 percent being for violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* (*Figure 10*).



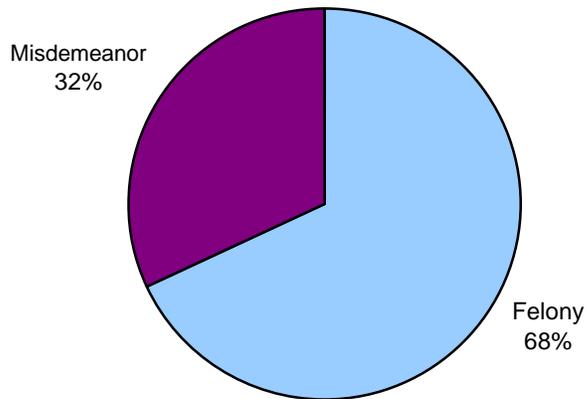
Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA; VMEG data reports to ICJIA

Cannabis arrests by class of offense

As seen in *Figure 2*, cannabis arrests in Vermilion County (for both VMEG and non-VMEG agencies) accounted for a large proportion of all drug arrests made each year from 2002 to 2011. As previously stated, more of the offenses under the *Cannabis Control Act* are classified as misdemeanor offenses. Therefore, it would be expected that a majority of cannabis arrests would be misdemeanors.

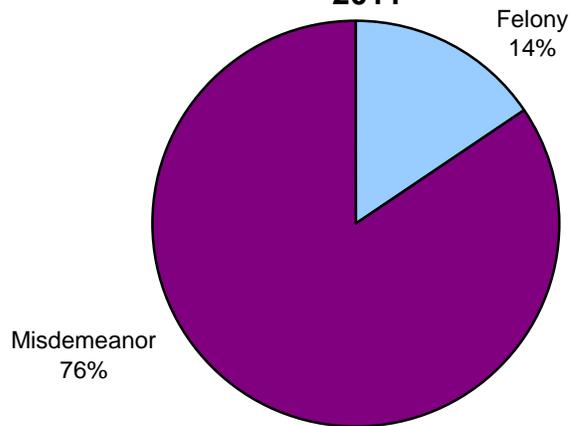
In 2011, 68 percent of the cannabis arrests made by VMEG were felony arrests compared to 14 percent for non-VMEG agencies. In contrast, non-VMEG cannabis arrests were primarily for misdemeanor arrests (*Figure 11 and 12*).

Figure 11
VMEG cannabis arrests by class, 2011



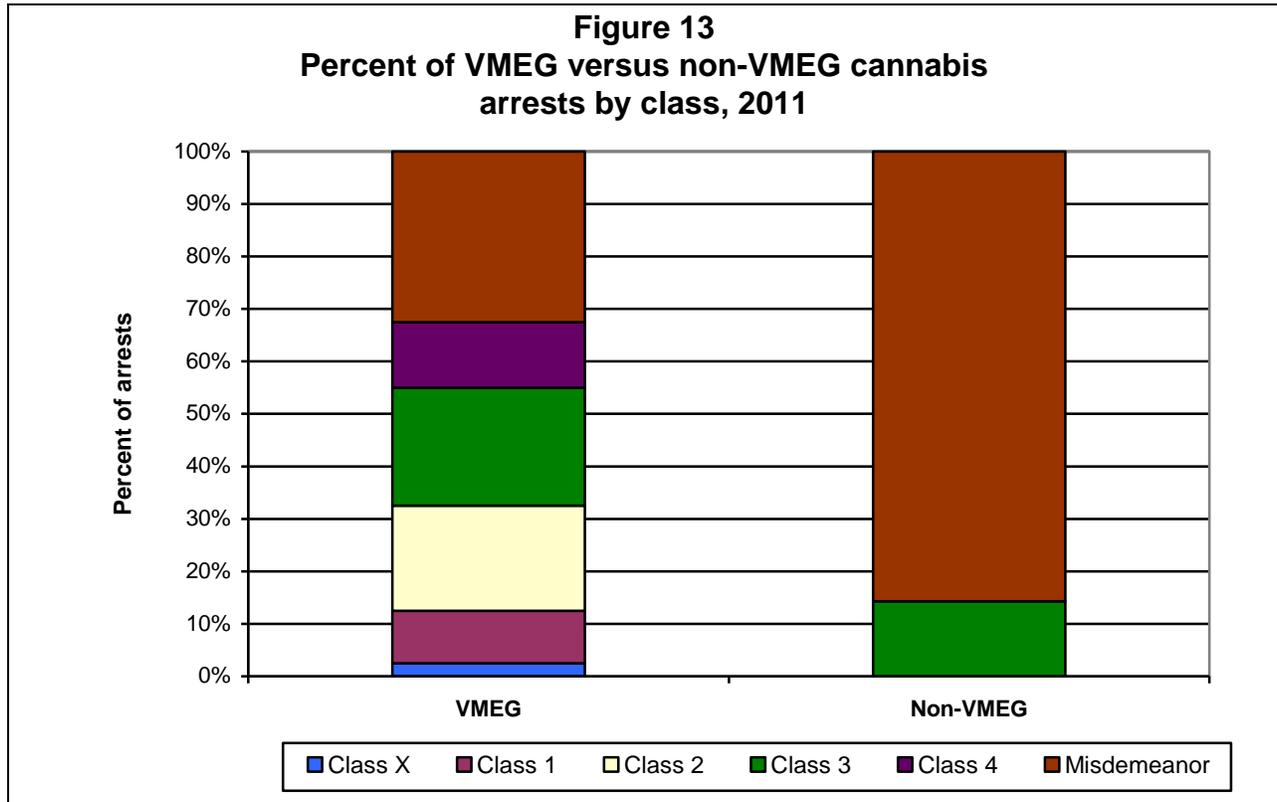
Source: VMEG data reports to ICJIA

Figure 12
Non-VMEG cannabis arrests by class, 2011



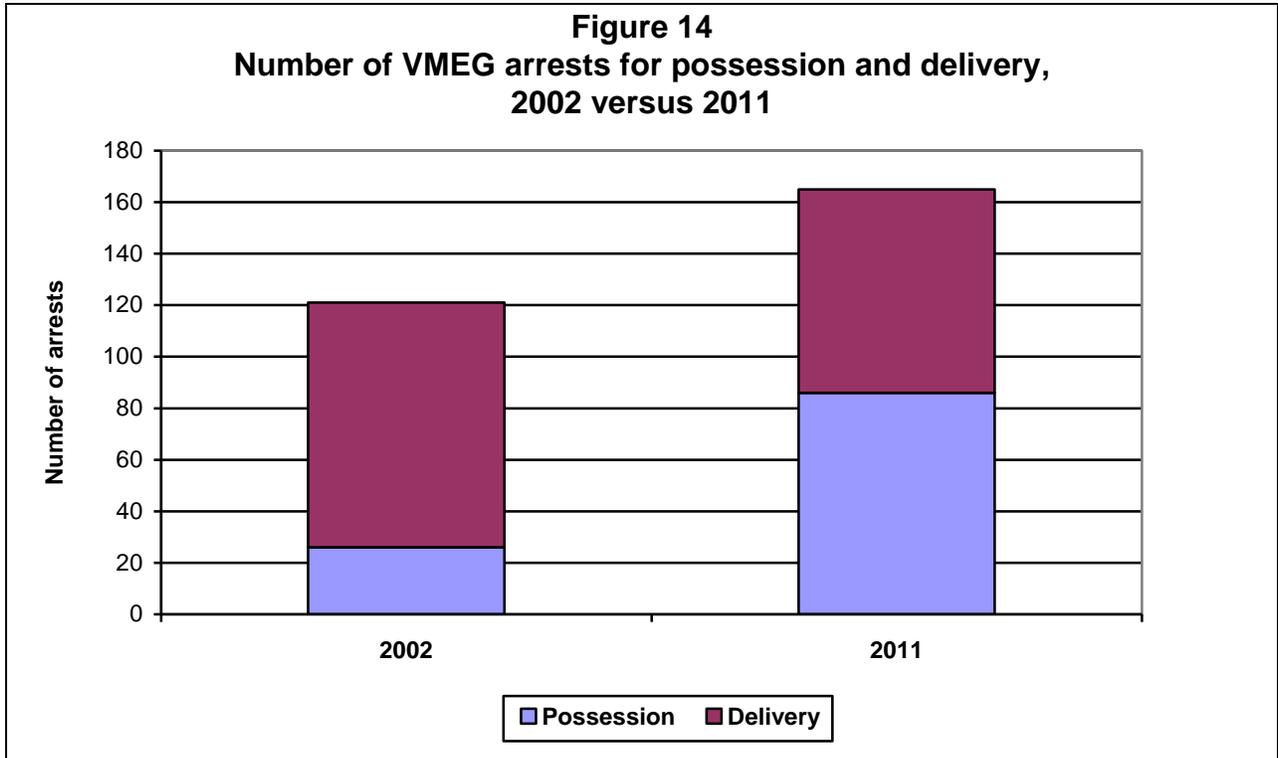
Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA

Figure 13 shows the number of cannabis arrests by class for both VMEG and non-VMEG agencies in 2011. Most felony arrests by VMEG were for Class 3 felonies. The majority of felony arrests by non-VMEG agencies were also for Class 3 felonies, however, as indicated earlier, felony arrests overall were much less prevalent compared to VMEG agencies. In 2011, approximately three percent of VMEG cannabis arrests were for a Class X felony.



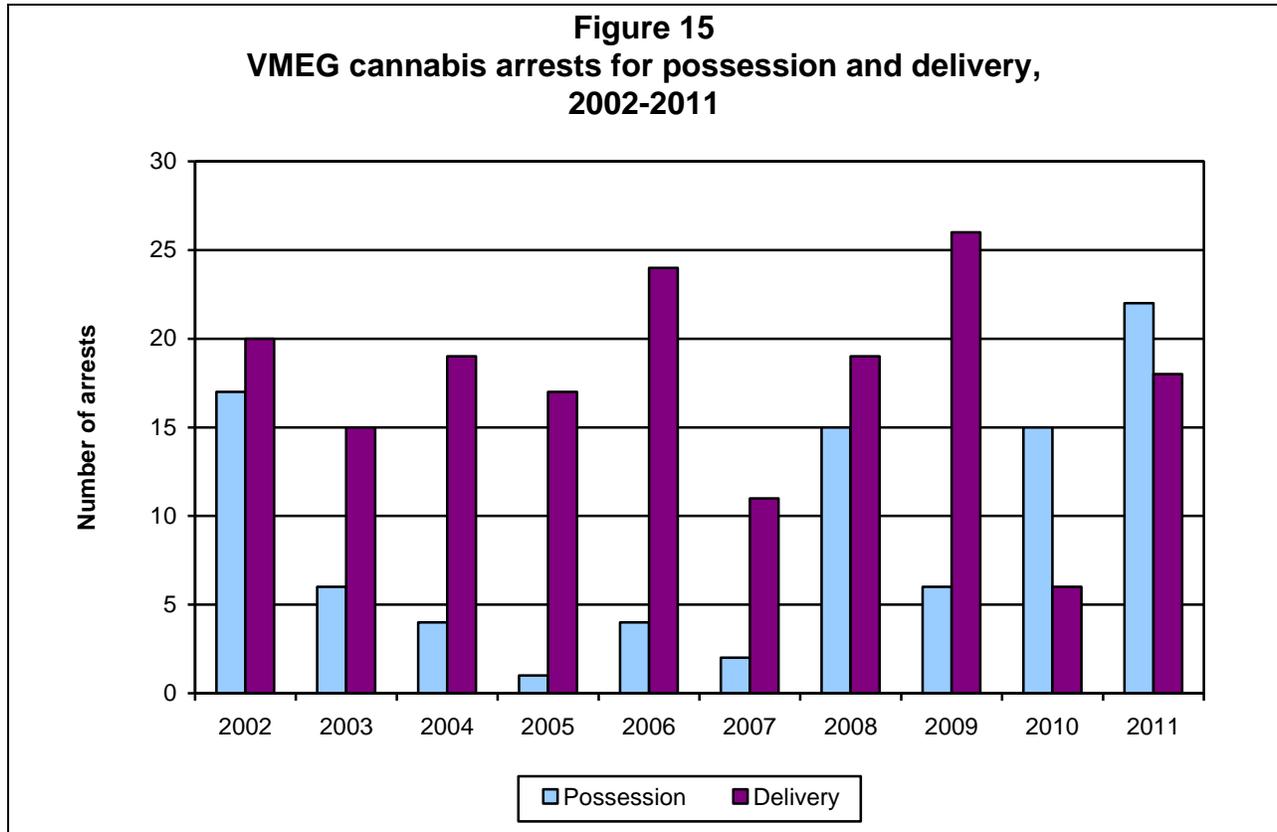
Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA; CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA

Between 2002 and 2011, the number of drug delivery arrests made by VMEG decreased from 95 to 79 (*Figure 14*). Arrests for drug delivery accounted for nearly 71 percent of all drug arrests made by VMEG between 2002 and 2011.



Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

During the period analyzed, delivery of cannabis accounted for 66 percent of all arrests for violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* (Figure 15). In 2011, 22 arrests were made by VMEG for possession of cannabis compared to 17 arrests in 2002. Eighteen arrests were made for delivery of cannabis in 2011 compared to 20 arrests for delivery of cannabis in 2002.



Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

Cannabis drug seizures

Drugs seized by law enforcement agencies are another indicator of the extent and nature of illegal drug trade in a jurisdiction. This section will look at the quantities of drugs seized by VMEG and reported to the ICJIA. VMEG data include total quantities of all drugs seized.

When illegal drugs are seized by law enforcement agencies, all or a portion of the total amount seized is submitted to a crime lab for analysis. Most agencies submit drugs to one of the Illinois State Police (ISP) crime labs. Depending on the location of the arrest and the type of arrest (i.e. local vs. federal), law enforcement agencies also submit drugs to the DuPage County Sheriff's Office Crime Laboratory, the DEA crime laboratory, private laboratories, or local police departments. Currently the only statewide data available on drug seizures is from the ISP crime lab, which represents the quantities of seized drugs that were submitted to ISP for analysis. It is due to these limitations that only the drug seizures made by VMEG will be discussed in this section and therefore comparisons cannot be made.

The primary factors influencing the amount of drugs seized are the number of officers assigned to the unit and type of investigations which are undertaken. Although experienced narcotics agents enhance the successful outcome of the unit's investigations, without sufficient manpower the ability to initiate and sustain successful investigations is greatly diminished. The state of the economy has placed many federal, state, county and local law enforcement agencies at reduced staffing levels. This in turn has required some agencies to reassign their officer(s) from the unit back to the parent agency thereby depleting available manpower in the unit. A traditional undercover investigation may develop into a conspiracy investigation which is time and labor intensive. A lack of manpower coupled with a time and labor intensive investigation translates into less time available for developing new investigations, conducting proactive enforcement details and undercover drug purchases.

Changes in drug trends also play a role in the type and quantity of seizures. An increase in new forms of designer drugs such as synthetic cannabis and bath salts, as well as quicker production methods of methamphetamine, requires a learning period for the agents. Agents then direct their efforts towards this new emerging community threat at the expense of time spent on traditional drug investigations. Spiked increases in these emerging drugs will skew seizures from previous years. Agents must constantly balance immediate community drug threats with investigations which attack the source of supply to the community. The availability of traditional drugs such as cocaine, crack, cannabis and heroin fluctuate with the supply chain. If an investigation in a community has sent members of a drug distribution network to prison, then a noticeable disruption in that particular drug is observed, even if for a brief period. Finally, seizure numbers may be lopsided if an investigation leads to a source of supply with an unusually large amount of contraband being seized during transportation or storage. (R. Bodemer, personal communication, January 25, 2011)

County-level cannabis, cocaine, crack, methamphetamine, and heroin seizure rates for Illinois' 102 counties based on ISP crime lab data are provided in the appendices of this report.

Cannabis seizures

The quantity of cannabis seized by VMEG fluctuated greatly between 2002 and 2011. In 2009, VMEG seized over 1.2 million grams of cannabis (*Table 2*). Cannabis accounted for an average of 90 percent of the total drug seizures made by VMEG from 2002 to 2011.

Table 2
Cannabis seized by VMEG, 2002-2011

Year	Amount seized in grams
2002	117,725
2003	153,823
2004	306,204
2005	74,841
2006	544,712
2007	76,747
2008	88,376
2009	1,238,658
2010	24,585
2011	17,481

Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

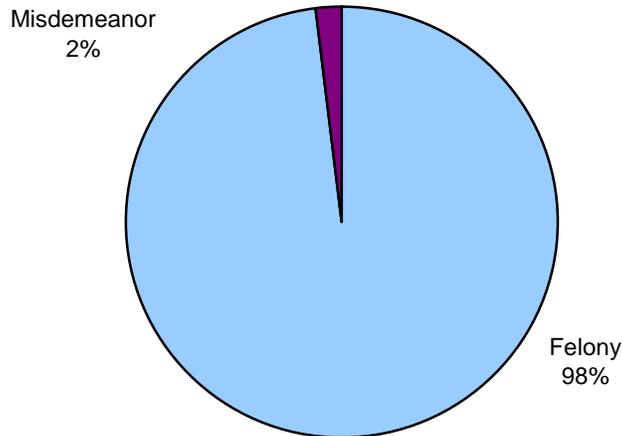
Controlled substance arrests

In Vermilion County, based on CHRI data, arrests for violations of Illinois' *Controlled Substances Act* increased 27 percent between 2002 and 2011, from 180 to 229 arrests.

VMEG arrests for violations of the *Controlled Substances Act* increased 49 percent, from 84 to 125 arrests during that time. In 2011, the 125 arrests for controlled substance violations accounted for 76 percent of all drug arrests reported to the ICJIA by the unit.

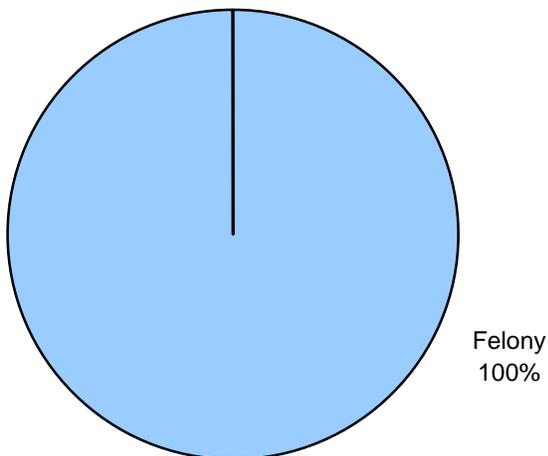
Approximately 98 percent of controlled substance arrests made by VMEG were felony arrests, compared to 100 percent for non-VMEG controlled substance arrests in 2011 (*Figure 16 and 17*).

Figure 16
VMEG controlled substance arrests by class, 2011



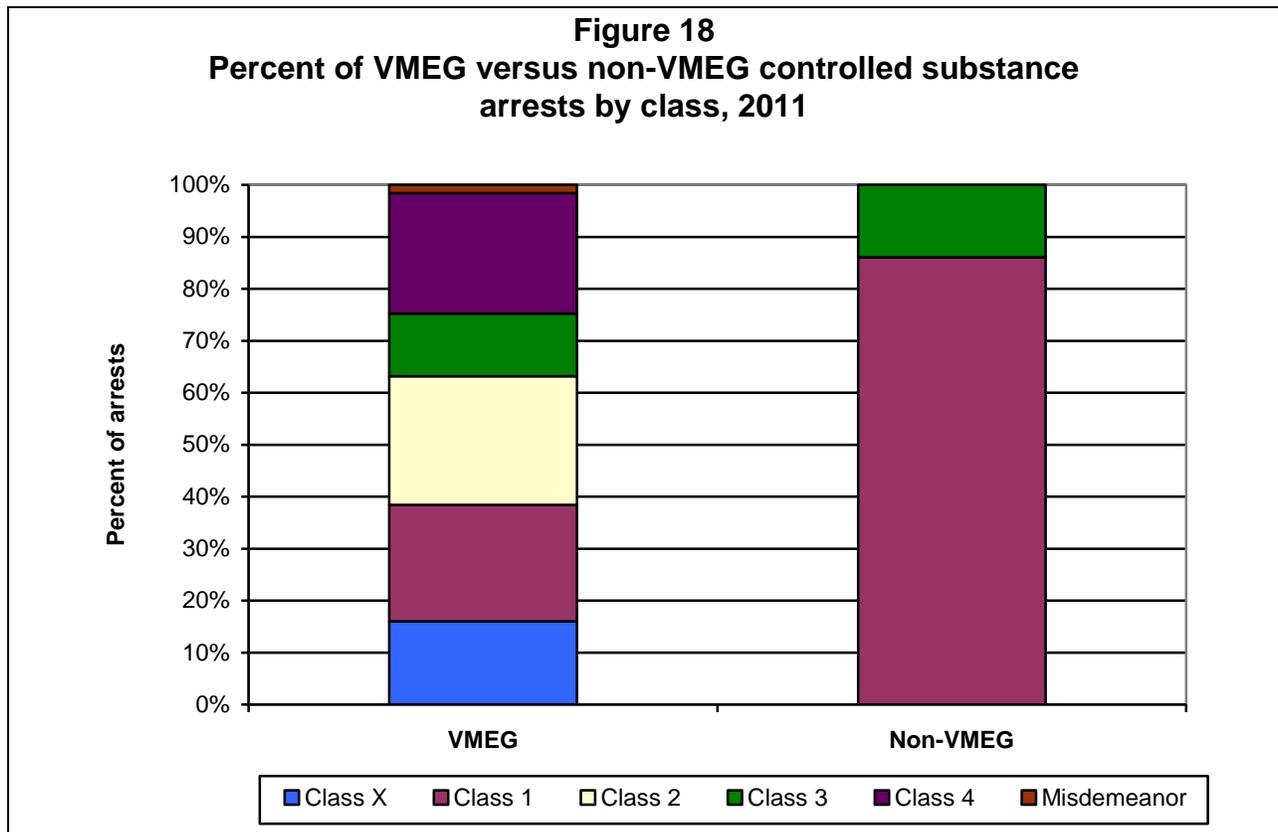
Source: VMEG data reports to ICJIA

Figure 17
Non-DUMEG controlled substance arrests by class, 2011



Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA

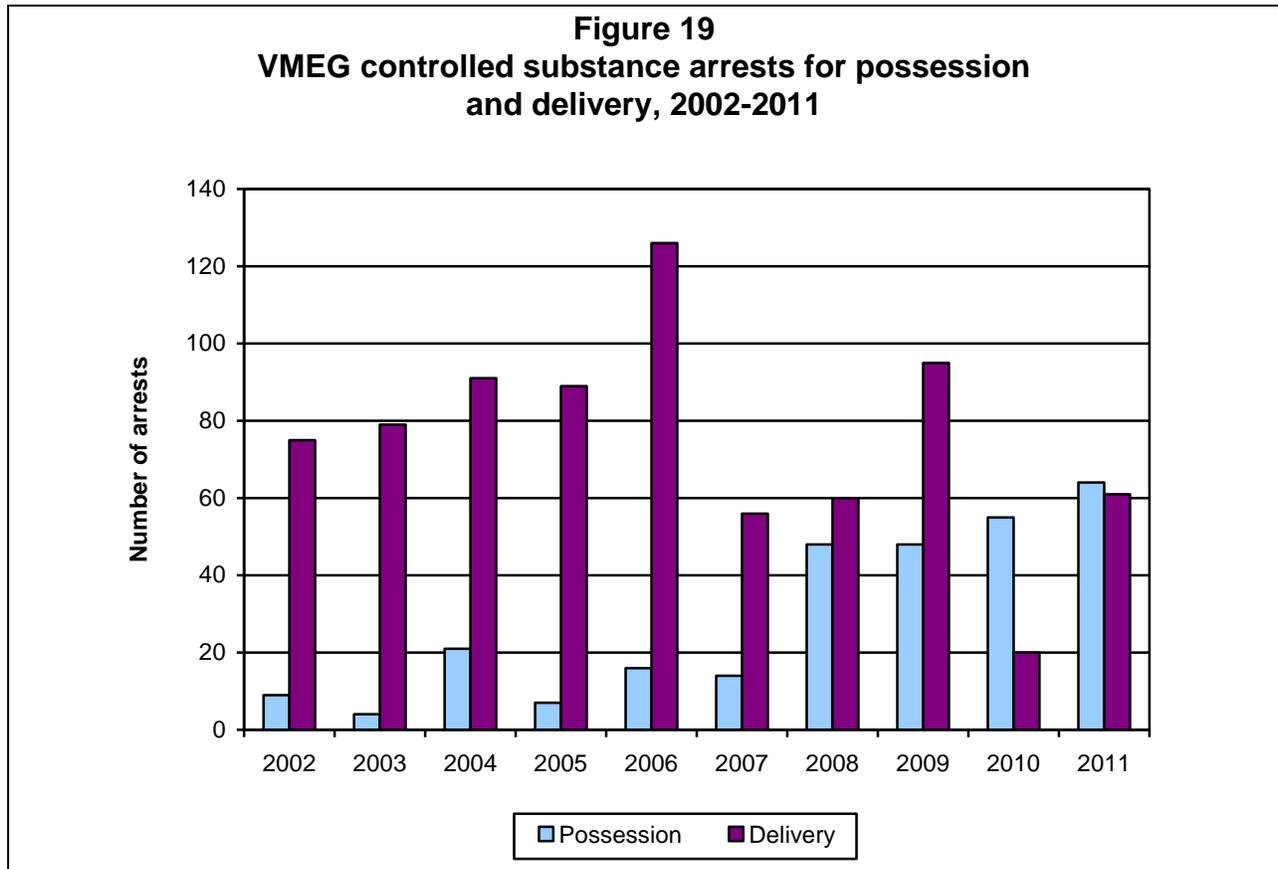
Figure 18 shows the number of controlled substance arrests by class for both VMEG and non-VMEG agencies in 2011. Approximately 16 percent of VMEG controlled substance arrests were for Class X felonies. Also, approximately one-quarter of the controlled substance arrests made by VMEG were for Class 2 felonies and 23 percent were for Class 1 and Class 4 felonies. The highest portion, 86 percent, of controlled substance arrests by non-VMEG agencies were for Class 1 felonies.



Source: CHRI data as interpreted by ICJIA; VMEG data reports to ICJIA

VMEG drug arrests by type

As indicated previously, the majority of all drug arrests reported by VMEG were for delivery and possession with intent to deliver controlled substances. Between 2002 and 2011, the number of controlled substance drug delivery arrests made by VMEG decreased from 75 to 61. During the same period, arrests for drug delivery accounted for 71 percent of all drug arrests made by VMEG between 2002 and 2011. Arrests for delivery of controlled substances accounted for 72 percent of the total number of arrests made for violations of the *Controlled Substance Act* (Figure 19).



Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

Cocaine seizures

Between 2002 and 2011, VMEG seized 16,868 grams of cocaine (*Table 3*). VMEG seized over 2,400 grams of cocaine in both 2002 and 2004, and over 7,000 grams in 2003. This is in comparison to a low seizure of 205 grams in 2011.

During the period analyzed, powder cocaine, rather than crack cocaine, accounted for nearly all cocaine seized by VMEG and the region covered by VMEG (81 percent).

Table 3
Cocaine* seized by VMEG, 2002-2011

Year	Amount seized in grams
2002	2,405
2003	7,259
2004	2,432
2005	274
2006	857
2007	1,789
2008	434
2009	764
2010	449
2011	205

*Includes both powder and crack cocaine seizures
Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

Methamphetamine and heroin seizures

In May 2005, the Illinois State Police created six regionally located methamphetamine response teams (MRT). These units were created specifically to target meth-related crimes with MRT personnel taking the lead on meth cases, including investigation and meth lab deconstruction and decontamination.

VMEG seized 267,365 grams of methamphetamine between 2002 and 2011, including over 6,500 grams in both 2010 and 2011. VMEG also seized 1,992 grams of heroin between 2002 and 2011. VMEG has had an increase in heroin seizure over the past three years, seizing less than one gram in 2009, 977 grams in 2010, and 988 grams in 2011. The amounts all of other controlled substance seizures are small relative to cocaine seizures.

Trends in prosecutions for drug offenses and all felonies

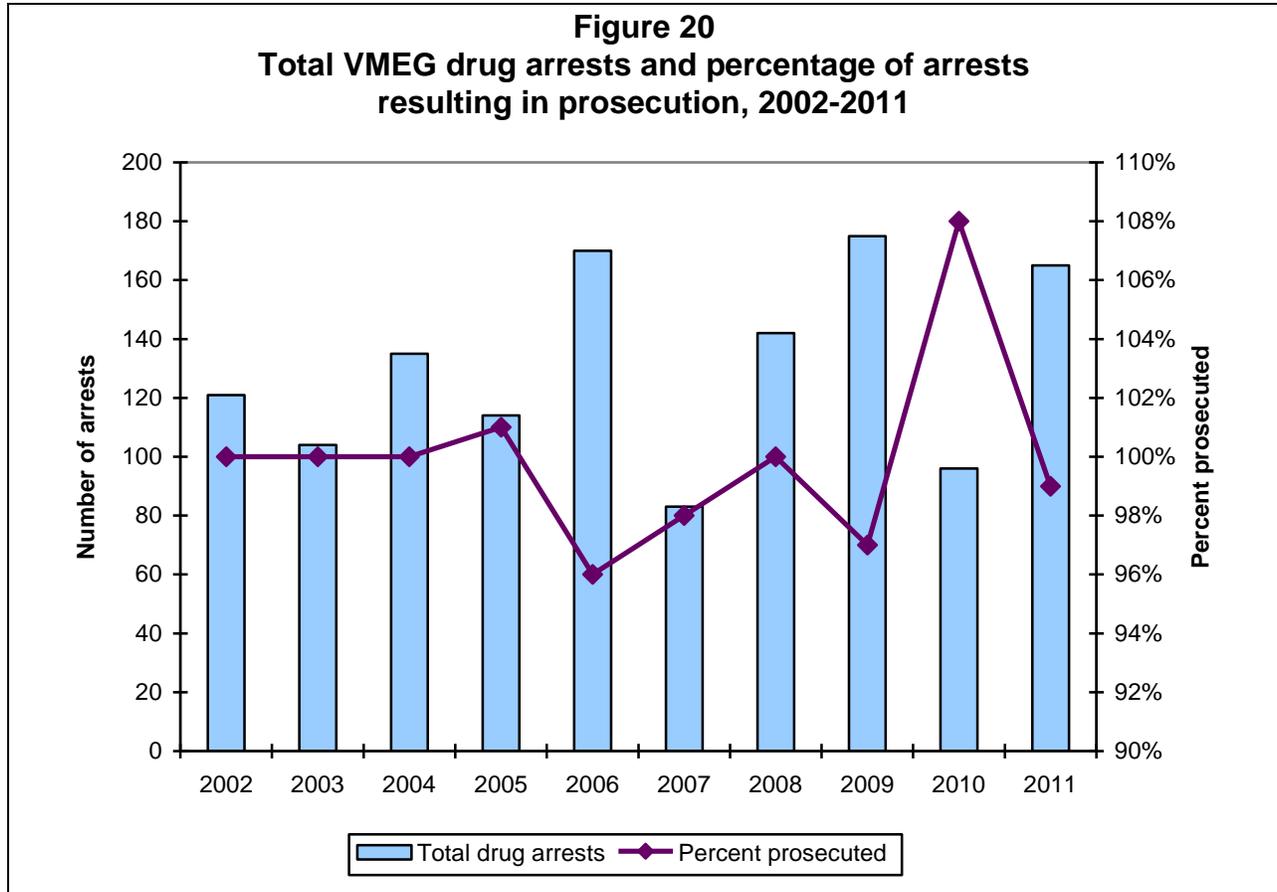
Drug prosecutions

Between 2002 and 2011, 1,299 drug prosecutions were initiated as a result of VMEG arrests in Vermilion County. A prosecution occurs after a prosecutor files charges against a defendant in court following an arrest. However, not all arrests result in a prosecution. A prosecutor may not file charges due to insufficient evidence or because the defendant was offered a deferred prosecution diversion. In addition, prosecution decisions may vary according to prosecutor practices in each county, which affects the number of prosecutions and ultimately the number of convictions.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) funds prosecution units in some, but not all, MEG/TF counties. These drug prosecution units work directly with drug task forces to handle their complex cases and high caseloads. These units develop drug cases, prosecute offenders, and conduct forfeitures. In FY10, there were eight drug prosecution units funded by the ICJIA working with drug task forces in Illinois. Seven counties had a designated drug prosecution unit—Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, St. Clair, and Will. In addition, the State’s Attorney’s Appellate Prosecutor provided attorneys to assist in prosecuting drug cases in 11 counties: Champaign, Jefferson, Kankakee, Macon, Madison, McLean, Peoria, Rock Island, Sangamon, Tazewell, and Winnebago.

Between 2002 and 2011, VMEG drug arrests increased 36 percent, from 121 in 2002 to 165 in 2011 (Figure 20). During that time period, 99 percent of all drug arrests by VMEG resulted in prosecution. Seventy-seven percent of VMEG drug offender prosecutions during that time period were for violations of the *Controlled Substance Act*.

In some years, data shows the percentage of prosecutions exceeded 100 percent of arrests. This is due to differences in the timing of an arrest and the filing of charges being reported by the unit.



Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

Drug convictions

Between 2002 and 2011, 35 percent of the 1,299 drug offenders prosecuted as a result of VMEG activity were convicted (n=457). Convictions for controlled substances accounted for 83 percent of all VMEG initiated prosecutions during the period analyzed. Due to the time lapse between an arrest and subsequent prosecution, the number of prosecutions and convictions during a year does not directly reflect the number of arrests during the same year. Convictions may also be impacted by various drug diversion programs for which certain defendants may be eligible. Illinois also has “710” and “1410” probation, which are two types of first offender probation specifically for drug offenders. Unlike other probation offenses, the convictions may be eligible to be expunged. Data from VMEG is currently the only readily available information on drug convictions.

Using CHRI data, it was possible to isolate non-VMEG convictions by subtracting drug convictions reported by VMEG from the total drug convictions in CHRI for Vermilion County, as both appear in CHRI. In 2011, there were 51 drug convictions in Vermilion County. VMEG reported that they had 57 task force drug offenders convicted and sentenced in 2011. Assuming that the majority, if not all, of VMEG arrests were made within Vermilion County, then all of the Vermilion County drug convictions were from VMEG.

Drug offender sentencing trends

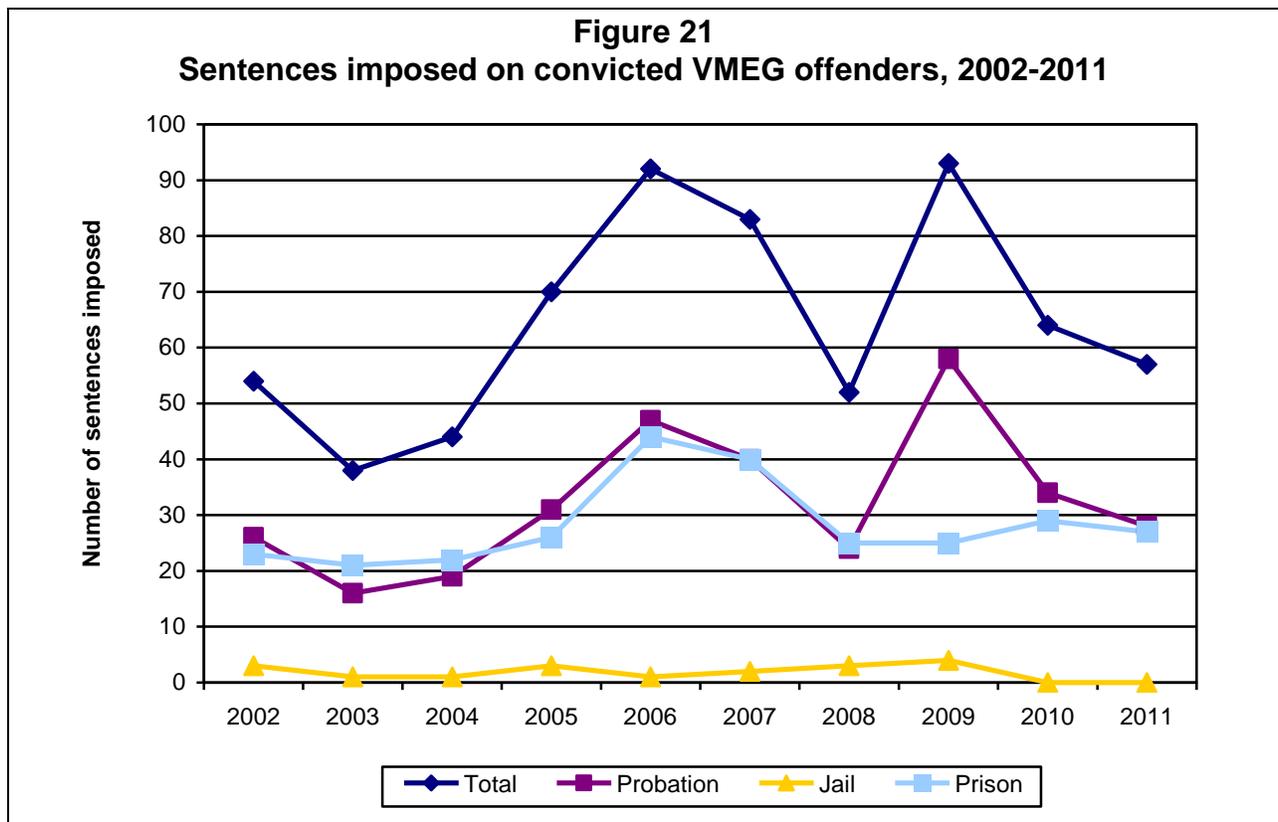
Under Illinois law, those convicted of most Class 1, 2, 3, and 4 felonies can be sentenced to a period of probation, periodic imprisonment, conditional discharge, imprisonment, a fine, restitution to the victim, and/or participation in an impact incarceration program. A fine or restitution cannot be the only disposition for a felony, and must be imposed only in conjunction with another disposition. When sentencing options exist for a judge a number of factors may influence the type and length of sentence imposed. These include the severity of the crime, the offender's criminal and social history, and the safety of the community.

Drug sentences

According to the data reports provided by VMEG, between 2002 and 2011, the number of VMEG drug offenders convicted and sentenced for their offenses increased slightly, from 54 to 57.

According to VMEG data reports to the ICJIA, between 2002 and 2011 the number of convicted VMEG drug offenders sentenced to prison increased slightly from 23 to 27. The number also increased slightly for probation, from 26 to 28. The number of convicted VMEG drug offenders sentenced to county jail (which could include jail in combination with probation) decreased from three to zero (*Figure 21*). In 2011, 2 drug offenders had a sentence of “other”.

In 2011, probation sentences were most common among convicted VMEG drug offenders (49 percent), followed by prison sentences (47 percent). There were no sentences to jail in 2011. The remaining four percent consisted of sentences to conditional discharge or court supervision.

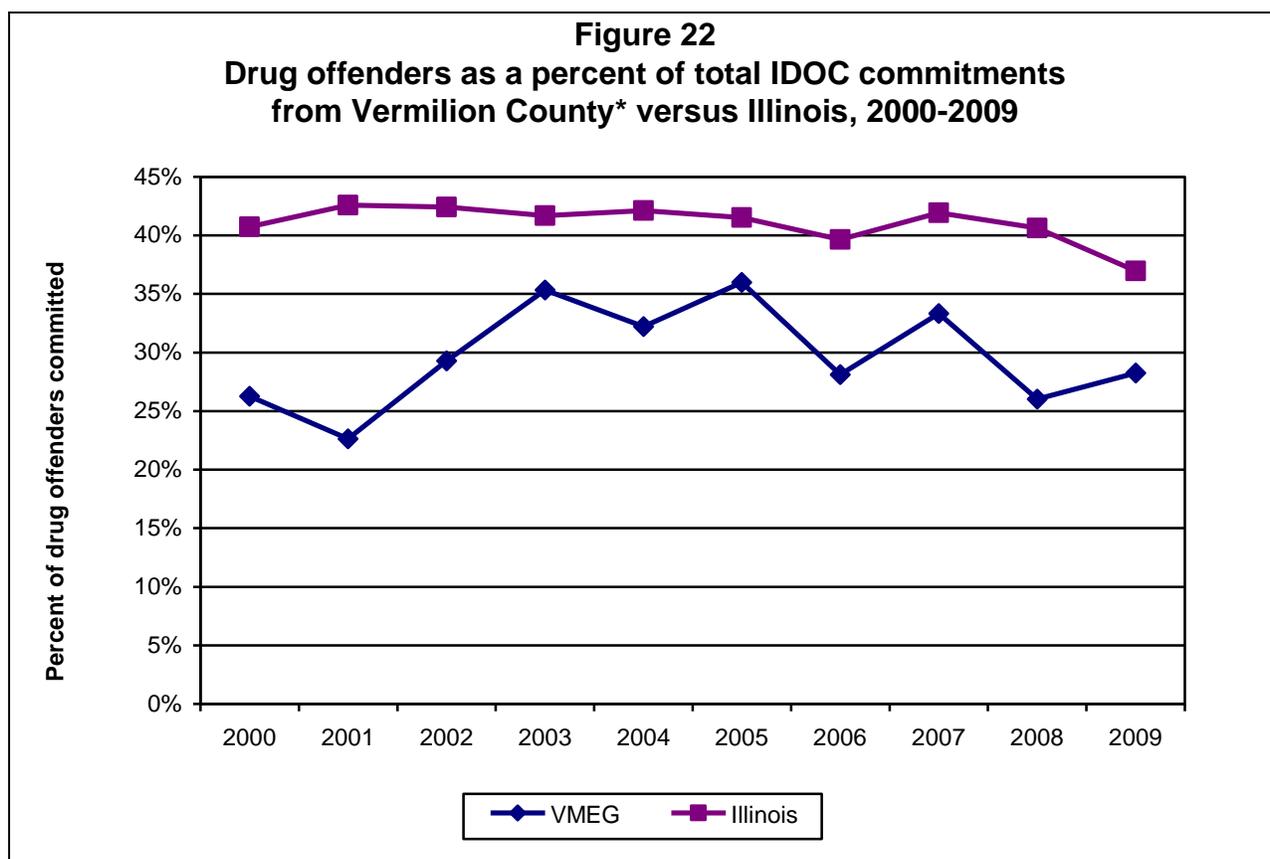


Source: VMEG data reports to the ICJIA

Sentences to corrections

According to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), between state fiscal years³ 2000 and 2009, the number of new court commitments to corrections for drug arrests made by Vermilion County local law enforcement agencies and VMEG combined increased 63 percent, from 41 to 65. The number of drug offender commitments resulting from VMEG arrests increased, from seven to 27, between 2001 and 2010. IDOC commitments from VMEG cases accounted for 38 percent of all drug-law violators sentenced to prison from the region in 2009, up from 19 percent in 2001⁴.

Statewide, the percentage of total new court commitments to IDOC accounted for by drug offenders remained relatively stable. However, drug offenders accounted for a slightly increasing percentage of adults convicted and sentenced to IDOC from Vermilion County. In 2000, drug offenses accounted for 26 percent of all Vermilion County-related commitments to IDOC, compared to 28 percent in 2009 (*Figure 22*).



*Includes VMEG and Non-VMEG offenders
Source: Illinois Department of Corrections

³ Some state data are collected by state fiscal year. State fiscal years begin July 1 and end the following June 30. For example, state fiscal year 2000 covers July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000.

⁴ While total prison sentences are obtained from IDOC data, those resulting from VMEG arrests are obtained from VMEG data reports.

Drug sentences to corrections by offense class

The offense class for drug sentences to corrections in Vermilion County (which includes offenders arrested by VMEG) also was examined. Class 4 felonies accounted for the largest proportion (41 percent) of sentences to IDOC for drug offenses during the period studied, followed by Class 1 felonies (28 percent), Class 2 felonies (18 percent), Class 3 felonies (7 percent) and Class X felonies (6 percent). Jail data is not currently available by offense type.

Between 2001 and 2010, the number of Class 4 felony sentences in Vermilion County nearly doubled, from 14 to 24, while Class 2 felony sentences increased from 10 to 18, Class 3 felony sentences remained stable at 3, and Class 1 felony sentences decreased from 16 to 13. The number of Class X felonies decreased from 5 to 2 during the same period.

Drug sentences to corrections by sentence length

An offender can be sentenced for a Class 4 felony to a period of incarceration from one to three years in the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). The incarceration length for a Class 3 felony is two to five years and a Class 2 felony is three to seven years in IDOC. The length of incarceration in IDOC for a Class 1 felony is four to 15 years. A person who pleads guilty to or is found guilty of a Class X felony can be sentenced to a minimum of 6, 9, 12, or 15 years depending on the amount of the drug, and a maximum of 30 years extendable in certain cases to 60 years.

According to IDOC, the mean sentence length for Class 4 felony drug offenders has slightly increased, from 1.8 to 1.9 years. The mean sentence length for Class X felony drug offenders decreased from 8.9 to 8.8 years. Mean sentence length for Class 3 felony drug offenders in Illinois increased, from 2.9 to 3.0 years. Class 2 felony drug offender mean sentence lengths increased from 4.0 to 4.2 years and Class 1 drug offender mean sentence length increased from 5.1 to 5.5 years.

Survey of MEGs and task forces

Although the distribution of illegal drugs is difficult to measure precisely, data obtained from criminal justice sources can be helpful in estimating drug availability and prices. The ICJIA periodically conducts a survey of each MEG and task force in Illinois to gauge perceived availability and cost of drugs in their jurisdictions. The most recent survey was conducted in July 2009.

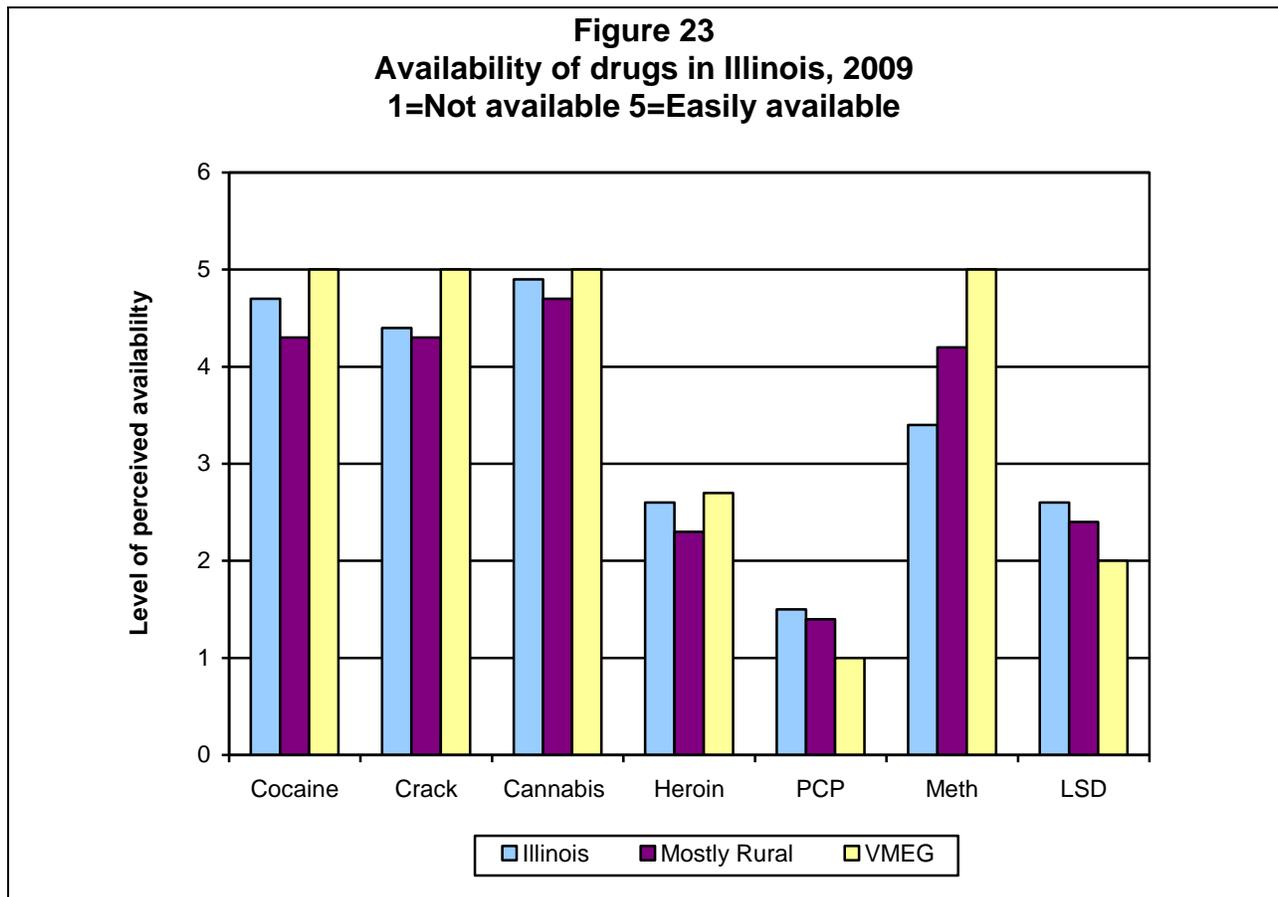
When applicable, responses from the 2000 survey and the most recent 2009 survey were compared. Results were analyzed by region. MEG and task force regions are classified as being either mostly urban, mostly rural, or mixed urban/rural, and were compared to similar units for purposes of this report.

Availability of drugs

According to survey responses, cannabis, powder cocaine, and crack cocaine continued to be the most visible drugs on the street. These drugs were reported as readily available across nearly all regions analyzed.

The perceived availability of most drugs in 2009 was relatively unchanged from 2000 in the region covered by VMEG. The reported availability of methamphetamine, and LSD increased in the region. In all MEGs and task forces in mostly rural regions similar to VMEG, the perceived availability of heroin and methamphetamine increased slightly while PCP, cocaine, and LSD decreased slightly.

Methamphetamine was reported as moderately available across Illinois. VMEG reported that meth was more available in Vermilion County, similar to the perceptions of other MEGs and task forces in mostly rural regions. Heroin appeared to be more readily available in Vermilion County than other mostly rural areas (*Figure 23*).

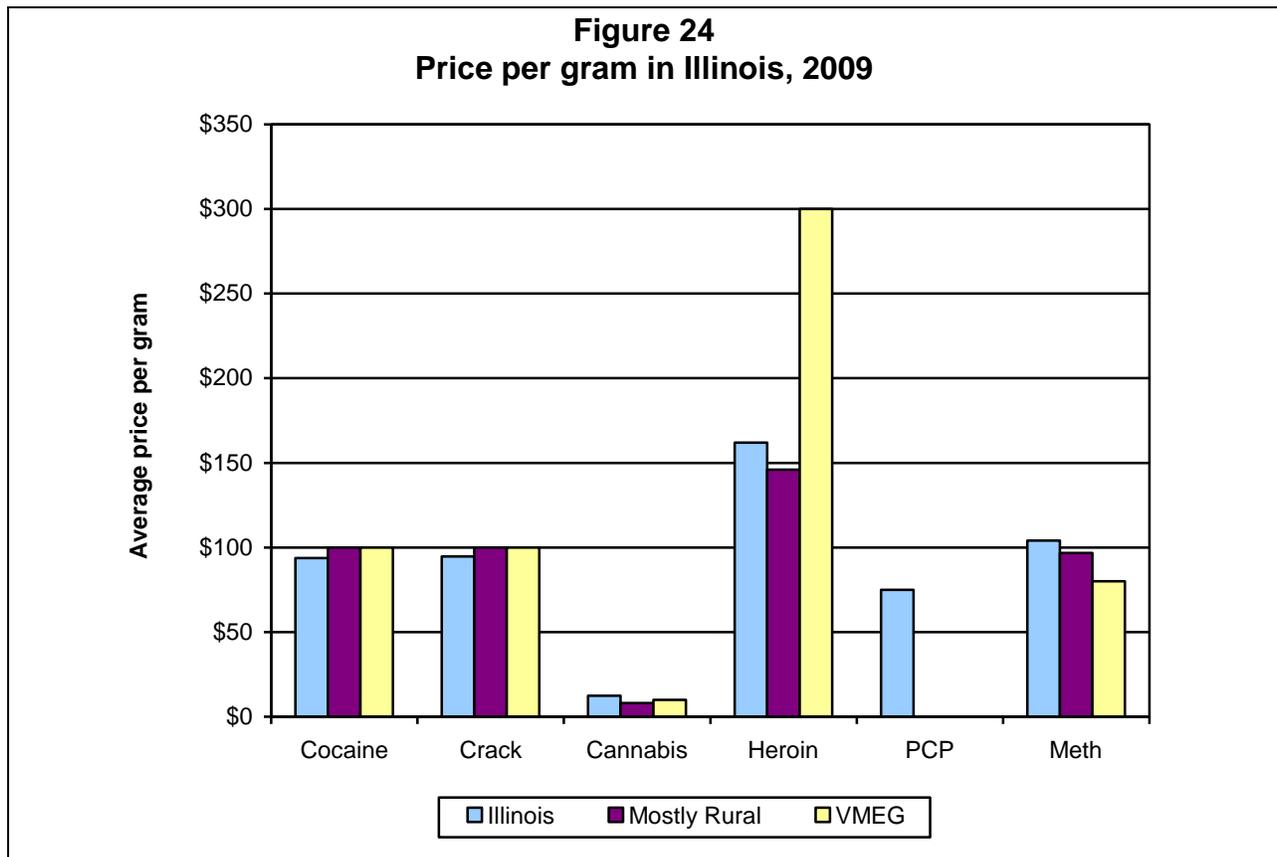


Source: Survey of Illinois MEGs and task forces

The price of drugs

Another market indicator is drug price—a change in supply, demand and availability are a few of the forces that determine drug price. In the statewide survey of MEG and task force units, changes in the average price of all the drugs examined between 2000 and 2009 varied across regions. The reported 2009 average prices of cocaine, crack, cannabis, and methamphetamine were relatively similar statewide and in mostly urban regions.

There were changes in the average prices of cannabis and heroin in the region covered by VMEG. In 2009, MEGs and task forces reported the average price of cannabis was \$12 per gram statewide, \$8 per gram in mostly rural regions, and \$10 per gram in the VMEG region compared to \$1 per gram in the VMEG region in 2000. The average price of heroin decreased during the last decade to \$162 per gram statewide and \$146 in mostly rural regions. The price of heroin was not reported in the region covered by VMEG compared to \$300 per gram in 2009 in the VMEG region. The average price of PCP was not reported for VMEG (*Figure 24*).



Source: ICJIA Survey of Illinois MEGs and task forces

Conclusion

Eight officers and two support personnel were assigned to VMEG in 2010, four of the officers were assigned by participating agencies and four from the Illinois State Police (ISP).

From 2002 to 2011, the number of cannabis and controlled substances arrests made by VMEG and reported to the ICJIA increased, from 121 to 165 with violations of the *Controlled Substances Act* accounting for more drug arrests made by VMEG throughout the period analyzed than violations of the *Cannabis Control Act*. In comparison, from 2002 to 2011, the number of cannabis and controlled substances arrests made by non-VMEG agencies decreased from 181 to 146. Violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* accounted for fewer drug arrests made by non-VMEG agencies throughout the majority of the period analyzed than violations of the *Controlled Substance Act*.

Between 2002 and 2011, the number of VMEG arrests for violations of the *Cannabis Control Act* increased 8 percent, from 37 to 40, while arrests for violations of the *Controlled Substances Act* increased 50 percent, from 84 to 125. In 2011, 76 percent of all drug arrests made by VMEG were for violations of the *Controlled Substances Act*.

The quantity of cannabis seized by VMEG fluctuated greatly between 2002 and 2011. Also, between 2002 and 2011, VMEG seized 16,868 grams of cocaine.

Between 2002 and 2011, 1,299 drug prosecutions were initiated as a result of VMEG arrests in Vermilion County. During the period examined, the number of VMEG drug arrests increased 36 percent, and 99 percent of all drug arrests by VMEG resulted in prosecution. Seventy-seven percent of VMEG drug offender prosecutions during this period were for violations of the *Controlled Substance Act*.

Using CHRI data, it was determined that in 2011 there were 51 drug convictions in Vermilion County. VMEG reported that they had 57 task force drug offenders convicted and sentenced in 2011. Assuming that the majority, if not all, of VMEG arrests were made within Vermilion County, then all of the Vermilion County drug convictions were from VMEG.

According to survey responses, cannabis, powder cocaine, crack cocaine and methamphetamine continued to be the most visible drugs on the street and were reported to be readily available across nearly every region.

While VMEG reported that PCP was less available in Vermilion County, methamphetamine appears to be more readily available in the county.

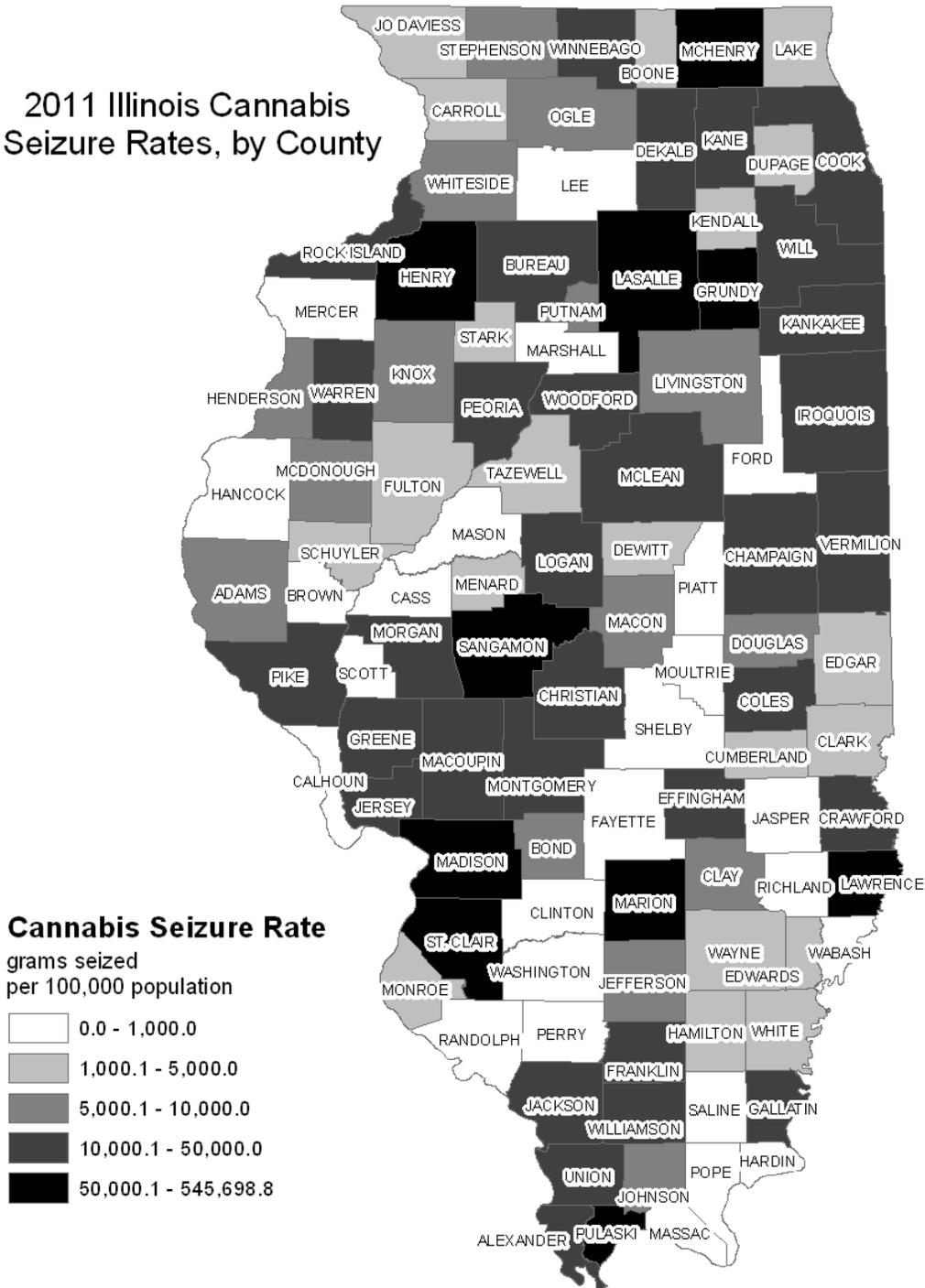
The reported 2009 average prices of cocaine, crack, and cannabis were relatively consistent statewide and in mostly rural regions. Heroin had a higher average price in the VMEG region than other regions, but methamphetamine had a lower average price.

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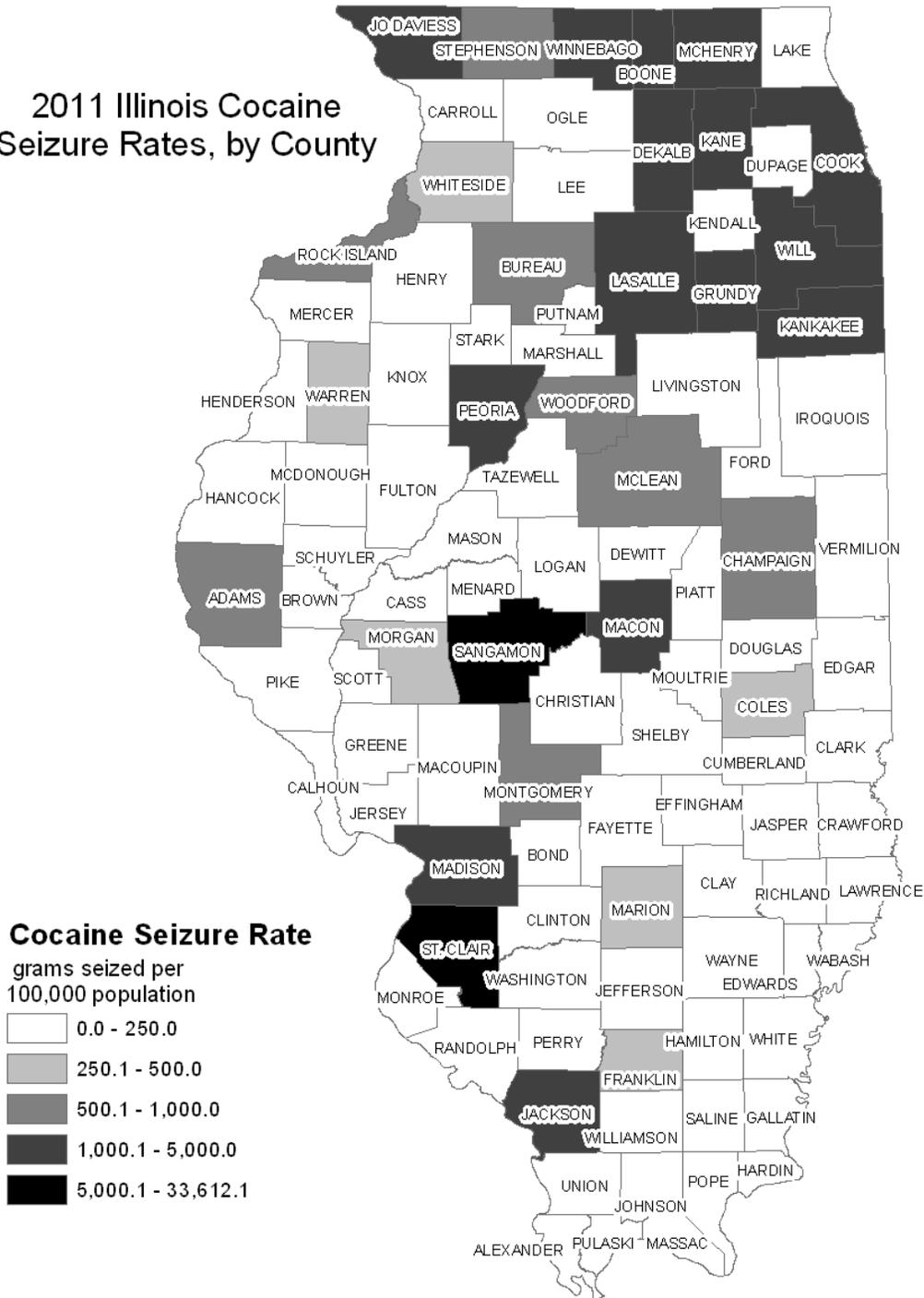
Appendix A

2011 Illinois Cannabis Seizure Rates, by County



Appendix B

2011 Illinois Cocaine Seizure Rates, by County



Appendix E

2011 Illinois Meth Seizure Rates, by County

