

Fentanyl in Chicago – By the Numbers



DEA
BULLETIN



Chicago Field
Division

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Event

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Chicago Field Division (CFD) conducted a study of all exhibits containing fentanyl and/or fentanyl-related substances (FRS) acquired within the CFD's area of responsibility (AOR) between fiscal year (FY) 2015 and FY 2019 up to May 30, 2019. The CFD AOR includes the States of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. The exhibits included those acquired by DEA and other federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. DEA North Central Laboratory analysis confirmed the presence of fentanyl or a FRS, and in several cases the exhibits were initially reported to be heroin.

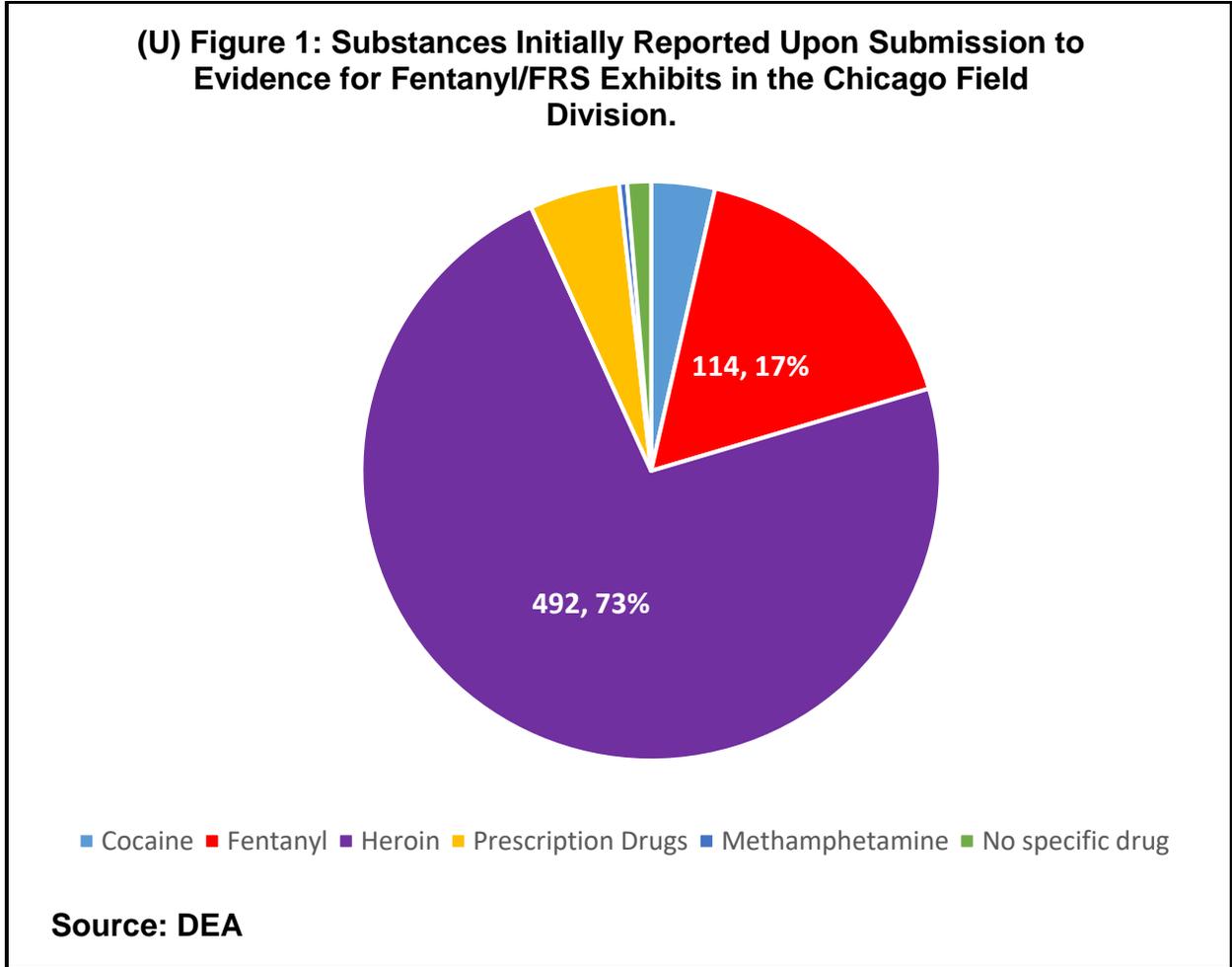
Significance

While the threat posed by the trafficking and distribution of fentanyl/FRS has been well documented in recent years, DEA reporting and non-DEA sources (e.g. medical examiner data) provide unique insights into the nature of the problems in the overall fentanyl/FRS situation. Analysis of these data sets confirms the growing problem of fentanyl/FRS in the DEA CFD's AOR, both in terms of the volume and diversity of fentanyl/FRS distributed in the region. Furthermore, the data sets underscore the crucial role that Chicago plays in the fentanyl trade as a drug trafficking hub for the Midwestern United States.

Details

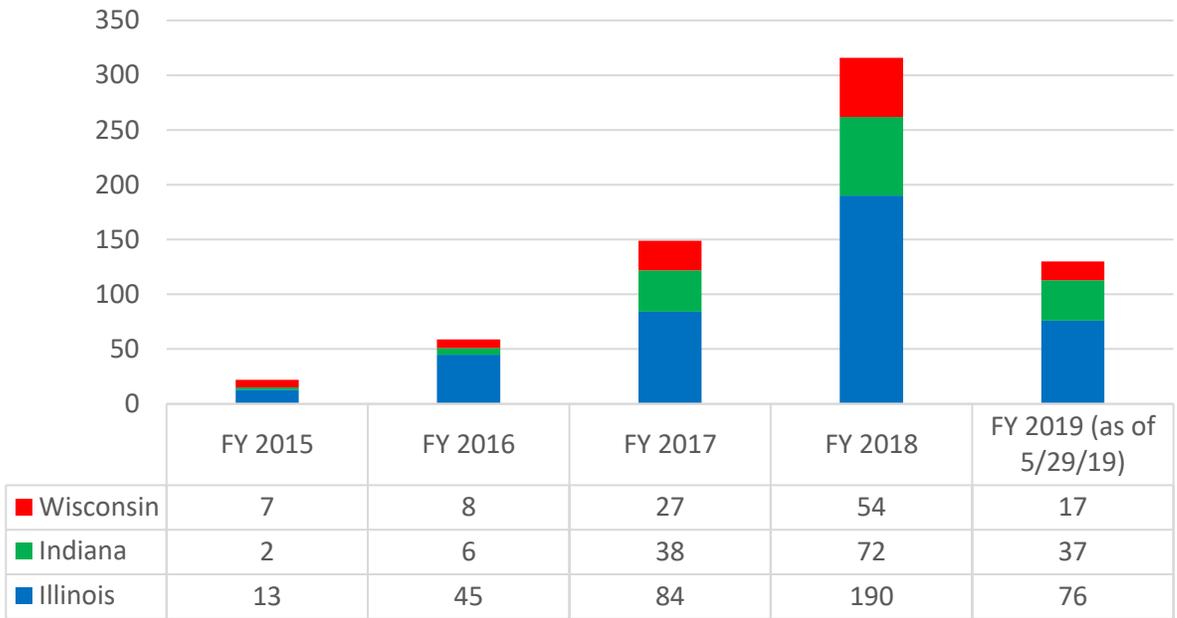
The CFD conducted a review of all drug exhibits from FY 2015 through FY 2019 (as of May 29, 2019) that contained fentanyl/FRS (as confirmed by DEA laboratory analysis). The seizures had been obtained by law enforcement either through seizure, purchase, or as a free sample. During this time period, 676 exhibits with a total net weight of 108.6 kilograms were found to contain fentanyl/FRS. Of the 676 exhibits, 29 weighed more than 900 grams. From this subset, 23 exhibits were seized in the Chicago area and underscored the city's significance in the wholesale distribution of illegal drugs within the United States.

The largest fentanyl exhibit, weighing 23 kilograms, was destined for the New York, New York, area. A total of 76 exhibits weighed between 90 and 899 grams. More than 75 percent of the fentanyl/FRS exhibits were initially reported as other substances, primarily heroin (492), but also hydrocodone, oxycodone, or other controlled prescription drugs (34); cocaine (24); and methamphetamine (3). Only 114 exhibits were reported as fentanyl (see Figure 1).



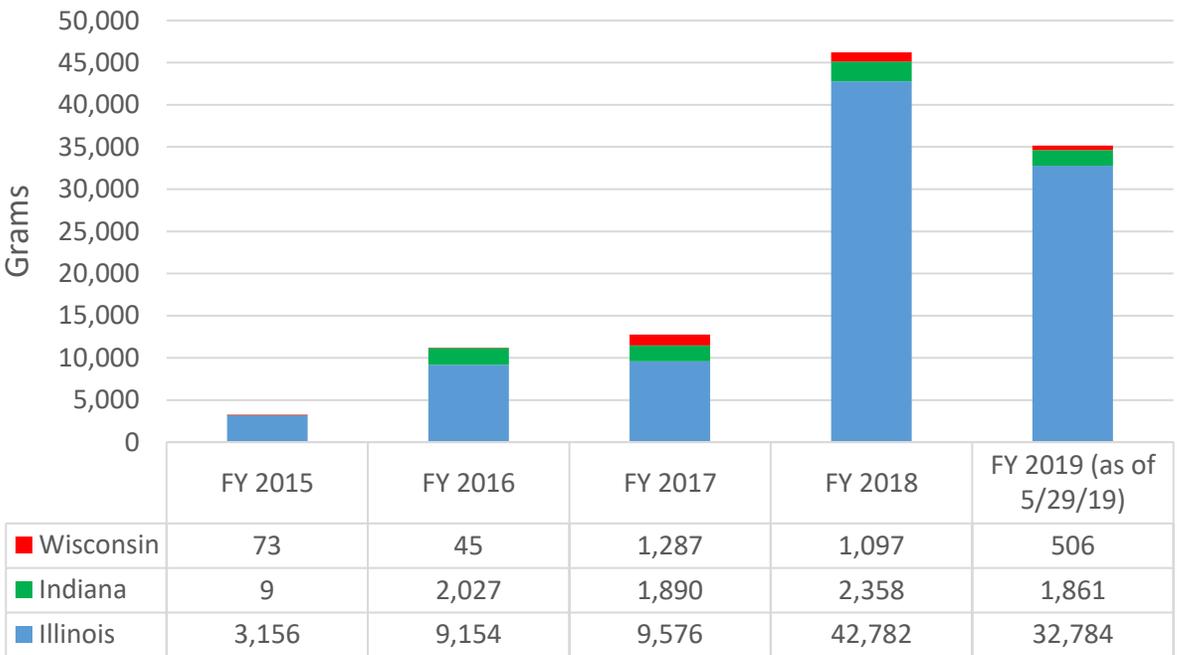
Both the number and volume of exhibits increased sharply from FY 2015 to FY 2018, highlighting the rapid introduction of fentanyl/FRSs into the domestic heroin market over the past few years. Notably, the greatest number and volume of fentanyl/FRSs were obtained by offices in Illinois, specifically in Chicago, further emphasizing the outsized role the city plays in the regional and national drug trade (See Figures 2 and 3).

(U) Figure 2: Number of Fentanyl/FRS Exhibits in the Chicago Field Division FY 2015 to FY 2019.



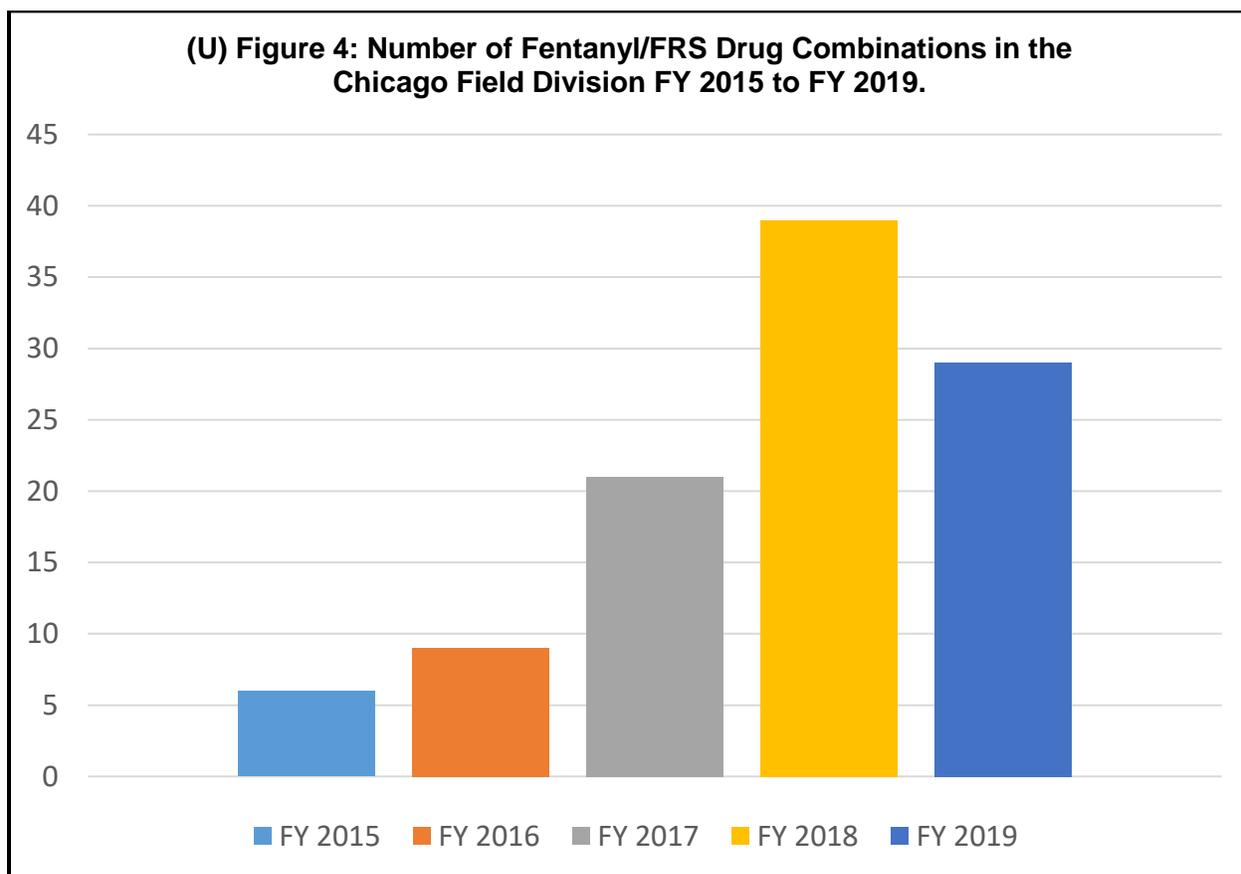
Source: DEA

(U) Figure 3: Net Weight of Fentanyl/FRS Exhibits in the Chicago Field Division FY 2015 to FY 2019.



Source: DEA

Of the 676 exhibits, 191 contained fentanyl and no other controlled substance; 109 contained a FRS and no other controlled substance; and 201 contained both heroin and a fentanyl/FRS. A wide variety of other controlled substances were found among these exhibits, including tramadol (36 exhibits), carfentanil (33), U-47700 or U-49900 (19), cocaine (17), methamphetamine (11), synthetic cannabinoids (9), and ketamine (4). A total 39 different drug combinations were found among the exhibits in 2018 alone, most consisting of just two controlled substances, but many having three or four. This highlights how quickly drug trafficking organizations have embraced fentanyl/FRSs and introduced different variations into the illicit drug supply. This rampant adulteration reinforces the danger inherent in acquiring drugs on the illegal market: appearances are deceiving as controlled substances are frequently mixed together with virtually no quality control.



Source: DEA

Within the CFD AOR, fentanyl trafficking and abuse is most severe in the greater Chicago area. Data from the Cook County Medical Examiner corresponds with the seizure and laboratory data regarding the increase in fentanyl/FRS availability in the region. A review of data from the Cook County Medical Examiner indicates in 2018 there were 655 opioid-related deaths in Cook County, which comprises the greater Chicago area. Of these, 472 (72 percent) involved fentanyl or an FRS. Additionally, 394 (60 percent) of all opioid-related deaths involved heroin, while 187 (29 percent) involved cocaine.

Analysis of the opioid-related deaths in Cook County further demonstrated the wide range of drug combinations available within the CFD AOR. Of the 394 opioid-related deaths involving heroin, 161 also involved fentanyl; 105 involved fentanyl plus at least one other FRS; and 15 involved a FRS—but not fentanyl. The most commonly reported FRSs were acetyl-fentanyl (137) and cyclopropyl fentanyl (42), followed by despropionyl fentanyl (27), furanyl fentanyl (12), carfentanil (10), methoxyacetyl fentanyl (8), norfentanyl (4), U-47700 (4), and acryl fentanyl (2). Other notable substances and combinations found in opioid-related death toxicology reports included alprazolam (100), tramadol (22), methamphetamine and/or MDMA (15), PCP (12), and mitragynine, commonly known as kratom (11).

(U) This product was prepared by the DEA Intelligence Program - Chicago Field Division. Comments and questions may be addressed to the Office of Intelligence Programs at DEA.IntelligenceProducts@usdoj.gov. For media/press inquiries call (202) 307-7977.

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