

# Methamphetamine Trafficking Offenses in the Federal Criminal Justice System



**United States Sentencing Commission**  
*June 2024*

Table 5. Most Serious Function in Methamphetamine Trafficking Offense, Fiscal Year 2022

### High Level Supplier

13.9% (n=192)

Supplies large quantities of drugs, usually to other drug distributors; is near the top of the distribution chain; and generally, does not deal in retail amounts; may employ no or very few subordinates; **owns the drugs**.

### Organizer/Leader

0.4% (n=6)

Organizes, leads, directs, or otherwise runs a drug distribution organization; has the largest share of the profits and the most decision-making authority; **owns the drugs**.

### Wholesaler

36.6% (n=504)

Buys and sells more than retail/user-level quantities in a single transaction; sells any amount to another dealer; **owns the drugs**.

### Manager/Supervisor

0.7% (n=9)

Serves as a "lieutenant" in a drug organization; manages or supervises a portion of the drug operation (manufacturing, importation, or distribution); takes instructions from a superior and conveys them to subordinates; supervises at least one other co-participant in an organization; **does not own the drugs**.

### Street-Level Dealer

12.3% (n=170)

Distributes retail/user quantities directly to the user; **owns the drugs**.

### Broker/Go-Between

4.1% (n=56)

Arranges for two parties to buy/sell drugs or directs potential buyers to a potential seller; **does not own the drugs**.

### Courier

23.4% (n=323)

Transports or carries drugs in or on their person or with the assistance of a vehicle or other equipment; **does not own the drugs**.

### Renter/Storer

0.9% (n=13)

Provides own residence (barns, storage bins, buildings), land, or equipment for use to further the offense in exchange for payment or compensation; **does not own the drugs**.

### Employee

5.6% (n=77)

Performs very limited, low-level function in the offense including running errands, answering the telephone, scouting, receiving packages, packaging the drugs, acting as a lookout, or acting as a deckhand or crew member on a vessel or aircraft transporting drugs; **does not own the drugs**.

### Other Function

2.0% (n=28)

Performed some other function, such as couriering money for a drug trafficking organization, working as a bodyguard, or financing a drug organization.



United States Sentencing Commission  
January 2021

# FENTANYL AND FENTANYL ANALOGUES

FEDERAL TRENDS AND TRAFFICKING PATTERNS



**Figure 17. Offender Function in Drug Trafficking Conspiracies**  
Fiscal Year 2019



**MANDATORY MINIMUM  
PENALTIES FOR DRUG OFFENSES**  
*in the*  
**FEDERAL CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE SYSTEM**

UNITED STATES SENTENCING COMMISSION  
OCTOBER 2017





United States Sentencing Commission  
MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTIES FOR FEDERAL DRUG OFFENSES (2017)

**Importer/High Level Supplier:** Imports or otherwise supplies large quantities of drugs (generally sells/possesses or purchases 1 kilogram or more in a single transaction); is near the top of the distribution chain; has ownership interest in drugs; usually supplies drugs to other drug distributors and generally does not deal in retail amounts; may employ no or very few subordinates.

**Organizer/Leader:** Organizes, leads, directs, or otherwise runs a drug distribution organization; has the largest share of the profits and the most decision-making authority.

**Grower/Manufacturer:** Grows, cultivates, or manufactures a controlled substance and is the principal owner of the drugs.

**Wholesaler:** Sells more than retail/user-level quantities in a single transaction; sells at least 1 ounce (28 grams) but less than 1 kilogram at one time; possesses or buys at least 2 ounces (56 grams) at one time, sells any amount to another dealer.

**Manager/Supervisor:** Serves as a lieutenant to assist one of the above; manages all or a significant portion of a drug manufacturing, importation, or distribution operation; takes instructions from one of the above and conveys to subordinates; supervises directly at least one other co-participant in an organization of at least five co-participants.

**Street-Level Dealer:** Distributes retail quantities directly to the user; sells less than 1 ounce (28 grams) quantities to any user(s).

**Broker:** Arranges for two parties to buy/sell drugs, or directs potential buyer to a potential seller.

**Courier:** Transports or carries drugs with the assistance of a vehicle or other equipment. Includes situations where the offender, who is otherwise considered to be a crew member, is the only participant directing a vessel onto which drugs had been loaded from a “mother-ship.”

**Mule:** Transports or carries drugs internally or on their person, often by airplane, or by walking across a border. Also, includes an offender who only transports or carries drugs in baggage, souvenirs, clothing, otherwise.

**Employee/Worker:** Performs very limited, low-level function in the offense (whether or not ongoing); includes running errands, answering the telephone, scouts, receiving packages, packaging the drugs, manual labor, acting as a lookout to provide early warnings [during meetings, exchanges, or on/offloading], passengers in vehicles, or acting as a deckhand/crew member on vessel or aircraft used to transport large quantities of drugs.



UNITED STATES  
SENTENCING COMMISSION  
(/)

# 2011 REPORT TO THE CONGRESS: MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTIES IN THE FEDERAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

## Summary

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This report assesses the impact of mandatory minimum penalties on federal sentencing, particularly in light of the Supreme Court's decision in *Booker v. United States*, which rendered the federal sentencing guidelines advisory. The United States Sentencing Commission prepared this report pursuant to a congressional directive contained in section 4713 of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, Pub L. No. 111-84, and the Commission's general authority under 28 U.S.C. §§ 994-995, as well as its specific authority under 28 U.S.C. § 995(a)(20) to "make recommendations to Congress concerning modification or enactment of statutes relating to sentencing, penal, and correctional matters that the Commission finds to be necessary and advisable to carry out an effective, humane, and rational sentencing policy."

Executive Summary

Related Reports:

## METHODOLOGY FOR OFFENDER FUNCTION CODING

### A. Offender Function Definitions

Table H-1 provides definitions for all 21 offender function categories used for the offender coding project discussed in Chapter 8. Each offender was assigned to one of the 21 categories in the table based on the most *serious* conduct described in the offense conduct section of the Presentence Report. The assignment of offender function category is solely based on the description of the offender’s conduct, not on court findings or guideline criteria for role in the offense. Terms used to describe offender function do not necessarily correlate with guideline definitions of similar terms. For example, the definition of manager/supervisor used to assign offender function does not match the guideline definition of manager or supervisor in USSG §3B1.1. The categories are listed in descending order of culpability, importer/high-level supplier is considered the most serious offender function, and user is considered the least serious offender function.

**Table H-1**  
**Offender Function Categories**

| <b>Function</b>               | <b>Definition</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Importer/high-level supplier  | Imports or otherwise supplies large quantities of drugs, is near the top of the distribution chain, has ownership interest in drugs (not merely transporting drugs for another individual), usually supplies drugs to other drug distributors and does not deal in retail amounts; may employ no, or very few subordinates. |
| Organizer/leader              | Organizes, leads, directs, or otherwise runs a drug distribution organization, has the largest share of the profits and the most decision making authority.                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Grower/manufacturer           | Grows, cultivates, or manufactures a controlled substance, and is the principal owner of the drugs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Financier/money launderer     | Provides money for purchase, importation, manufacture, cultivation, transportation, or distribution of drugs; launders proceeds of drug sales or purchases.                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Aircraft pilot/vessel captain | Pilots aircraft or other vessel, requires special skill; does not include offenders who are sole participants directing a small boat ( <i>e.g.</i> , a go-fast boat) onto which drugs have been loaded from a “mother ship” ( <i>See</i> courier/mule below).                                                               |
| Wholesaler                    | Sells one ounce or more in a single transaction, sells any amount to another dealer, buys two ounces in a single transaction, possesses two ounces or more.                                                                                                                                                                 |

**Table H-1**  
**Offender Function Categories**

| <b>Function</b>                    | <b>Definition</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Manager                            | Serves as a lieutenant to assist one of the above functions; manages all or a significant portion of a drug manufacturing, importation, or distribution operation; takes instructions from one of the above functions and conveys to subordinates; supervises directly at least one other co-participant in an organization of at least five co-participants.      |
| Bodyguard/strongman/debt collector | Provides physical and personal security for another co-participant in the offense; collects debts owed, or punishes recalcitrant persons.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Chemist/cook/chemical supplier     | Produces LSD, methamphetamine, crack, or other drugs, but is not the principal owner of the drugs and therefore does not qualify as a grower/manufacturer. Chemical suppliers do not handle the drugs, but engage in the unlawful diversion, sale, or furnishing of listed chemicals or equipment used in the synthesis or manufacturing of controlled substances. |
| Supervisor                         | Supervises at least one other co-participant but has limited authority and does not qualify as a manager.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Street-level dealer                | Distributes retail quantities directly to the drug user. Sells less than one ounce in a single transaction.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Broker/steerer/go-between          | Arranges for two parties to buy or sell drugs, or directs potential buyers to potential sellers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Courier                            | Transports or carries drugs with the assistance of a vehicle or other equipment. Includes offenders, otherwise considered to be crew members, who are the sole participants directing a vessel ( <i>e.g.</i> , a go-fast boat) onto which drugs have been loaded from a “mother ship.”                                                                             |
| Mule                               | Transports or carries drugs internally or on his/her person, often by airplane or crossing the border. Includes offenders who only transport or carry drugs in baggage, souvenirs, clothing, or otherwise.                                                                                                                                                         |
| Renter/storer                      | Provides, for profit or other compensation, a personal residence, structure (barn, building, storage facility), land, or equipment for use in the drug offense. Distinguished from enablers due to compensation received for services.                                                                                                                             |
| Money runner                       | Transports or carries money and/or drugs to and from the street-level dealer.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Off-loader/loader                  | Performs the physical labor required to put large quantities of drugs into storage, hiding, or onto a mode of transportation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

**Table H-1**  
**Offender Function Categories**

| <b>Function</b>                         | <b>Definition</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gopher/lookout/deckhand/worker/employee | Performs very limited, low-level function in the offense (one time, or ongoing); including running errands, answering the telephone, receiving packages, packaging drugs, manual labor, acting as a lookout during meetings, exchanges, or off-loading, or acting as a deckhand/crew member on a vessel or aircraft used to transport large quantities of drugs.                                   |
| Enabler                                 | Plays only a passive role in the offense, knowingly permitting certain unlawful activity to occur without affirmatively acting in any way to further the activity, may be coerced or unduly influenced to participate ( <i>e.g.</i> , a parent or grandparent threatened with displacement from home unless they permit the activity to take place), or may do so as a favor without compensation. |
| User                                    | Possesses a small quantity of drugs apparently for personal use only, performs no apparent function that furthers the overall drug trafficking offense.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Other                                   | Offender does not clearly fit into any of the above function categories.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Missing/indeterminable                  | Not enough information provided to determine the offender's function.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |