



Federal Simple Drug Possession

Weighing the Charges: Simple Possession of Drugs in the Federal Criminal Justice System¹

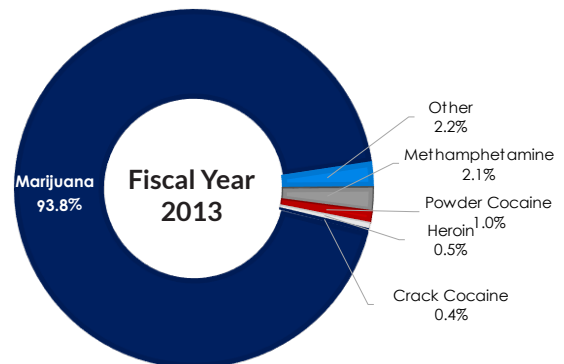
Overview

Between fiscal year 2008 and fiscal year 2013, the number of federal offenders whose most serious offense was simple drug possession increased nearly 400%, and by more than 800% for simple possession of marijuana. A change of this magnitude over a relatively short time period prompted further research by the United States Sentencing Commission. The Commission's findings are summarized below.

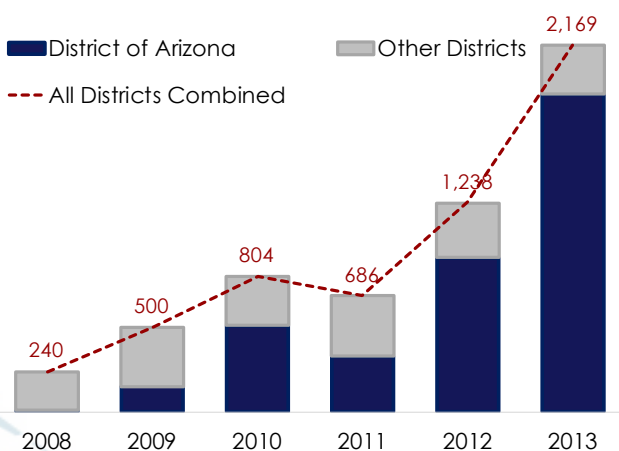
Report Highlights

- Simple possession of marijuana accounted for nearly all of the federal simple drug possession offenses in fiscal year 2013.
- Nearly all (91.5%) simple possession of marijuana offenders were apprehended at or near the U.S./Mexico border, possessing a median amount of 48.5 pounds—an amount that does not appear to correspond to simple possession.²

Primary Drug Type Involved in Federal Simple Drug Possession Offenses



Federal Simple Possession of Marijuana Offenders By Judicial District and Year



- A single judicial district, the District of Arizona largely accounts for the increase in the total number of federal simple possession of marijuana offenses from fiscal year 2008 through fiscal year 2013.
- These findings suggest that the sizable increase in federal simple possession of marijuana offenses is the result of marijuana trafficking offenses in the District of Arizona for which the offender is prosecuted for a simple drug possession offense.
- If simple possession of marijuana offenses are removed from the analysis, the number of federal simple drug possession offenses actually declined since fiscal year 2008.

Endnotes

1. Authored by Melissa K. Reimer, Research Associate, Office of Research and Data. Published September 21, 2016.

2. This corresponds to 22,000 grams of marijuana. In contrast, marijuana possession offenders apprehended at a non-Border location were found with a median amount of 5.2 grams of marijuana. See page 9 of the full report.

SOURCE: United States Sentencing Commission Fiscal Year 2008-2013 Datafiles and Special Coding Project data.

