

PRIMER



DRUG GUIDELINES

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I. INTRODUCTION

This primer is intended to provide a general overview of the statutes, sentencing guidelines, and relevant case law relating to drug trafficking. This primer focuses primarily on application of the drug trafficking guidelines and related sentencing issues. Although the primer identifies some of the issues and cases related to the sentencing of drug trafficking offenses, it is not a comprehensive compilation of case law and is not intended to be a substitute for independent research and analysis of primary authority.¹

II. DRUG STATUTES

A. THE STATUTORY SCHEME

The most commonly used drug statutes include the following:

21 U.S.C. § 841	Prohibits the manufacture and distribution of, and possession with intent to distribute, controlled substances
21 U.S.C. § 846	Prohibits attempts and conspiracies to manufacture, distribute or possess with intent to distribute controlled substances
21 U.S.C. § 952	Prohibits the importation of controlled substances
21 U.S.C. § 953	Prohibits the exportation of controlled substances
21 U.S.C. § 963	Prohibits attempts and conspiracies to import/export controlled substances

The penalty structures for these and other drug crimes are set out in 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b) and 960(b). The minimum and maximum statutory penalties are driven by the type and the quantity of the drug involved, but may be increased if the offense involved death or serious bodily injury, or if the offender has a prior conviction for a felony drug offense. For example:

Pursuant to 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b)(1)(A) and 960(b)(1), a statutory range of ten years to life applies to offenses involving at least:

¹ Detailed materials on the Commission's 2014 drug guidelines amendment that reduced sentencing guideline penalties for most federal drug trafficking offenders by two levels are available at <http://www.ussc.gov/policymaking/amendments/materials-2014-drug-guidelines-amendment>. In addition, a detailed discussion of retroactivity, including issues related to the Fair Sentencing Act and the Supreme Court's decisions in *Dorsey v. United States*, 567 U.S. 260 (2012), and *Dillon v. United States*, 560 U.S. 817 (2010), is presented in the Commission's subject matter primer on *Retroactivity*, available at <https://www.ussc.gov/guidelines/primers>.

1 kilogram of Heroin
5 kilograms of Cocaine (powder)
280 grams of Cocaine base
1,000 kilograms of Marijuana or 1,000 plants
50 grams of actual Methamphetamine or 500 grams of mixture or substance

Pursuant to 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b)(1)(B) and 960(b)(2), a statutory range of 5 to 40 years applies to offenses involving at least:

100 grams of Heroin
500 grams of Cocaine (powder)
28 grams of Cocaine base
100 kilograms of Marijuana or 100 plants
5 grams of actual Methamphetamine or 50 grams of mixture or substance

Pursuant to 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b)(1)(C) and 960(b)(3), a statutory range of 0 to 20 years applies to offenses involving lesser quantities of drugs.

A statutory maximum of five years is provided for offenses involving less than 50 kilograms of marijuana and for certain other lesser offenses. *See* 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b)(1)(D) and 960(b)(4).

B. LEGAL ISSUES

1. Aggregating Quantity

Drug amounts should not be aggregated to apply a higher statutory penalty range than any of the individual substantive counts would support. That is, where the defendant is convicted of separate substantive counts, the drug amounts are not added together to reach a mandatory minimum sentence. *United States v. Harrison*, 241 F.3d 289, 292 (2d Cir. 2001) (noting drug quantities from separate transactions are not aggregated for purposes of calculating a mandatory minimum, but the combined quantities are relevant under §2D1.1 to establish the base offense level); *United States v. Rettelle*, 165 F.3d 489, 492 (6th Cir. 1999) (holding that it was error to construe the statutory penalty as applying to aggregate amounts of drugs held manufactured on various separate occasions); *United States v. Santos*, 195 F.3d 549, 553 (10th Cir. 1999); *United States v. Rodriguez*, 67 F.3d 1312, 1324 (7th Cir. 1995); *United States v. Estrada*, 42 F.3d 228, 232 n.4 (4th Cir. 1994).

In a conspiracy conviction, however, the quantities of each single type of drug charged within the conspiracy are aggregated to establish statutory penalties. *See, e.g., United States v. Pressley*, 469 F.3d 63, 66 (2d Cir. 2006); *United States v. Gori*, 324 F.3d 234, 237 (3d Cir. 2003). Note, however, that uncharged drug quantities are not included to establish statutory penalties. *See Alaniz v. United States*, 351 F.3d 365, 368 (8th Cir. 2003) (reviewing 28 U.S.C. § 2255 challenge to conspiracy to distribute marijuana conviction and

explaining that “[e]very circuit that has considered the issue has concluded that a second, uncharged drug type cannot be added to the charged drug type in order to trigger a higher statutory penalty range.”).

2. Enhanced Penalties

Sections 841(b) and 960(b) include enhancement provisions based on the defendant’s prior record, which apply only if the government provides notice pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 851 (proceedings to establish previous convictions). A qualifying prior conviction increases a 5- to 40-year range to a range of ten years to life. A qualifying prior conviction increases a ten-year mandatory minimum to a 15-year mandatory minimum (the maximum remains life); a second qualifying prior conviction increases a ten-year mandatory minimum to a 25-year mandatory minimum. The general rule that a jury must find any fact that will increase the penalty for an offense does not apply to prior convictions. *See, e.g., United States v. Thomas*, 398 F.3d 1058, 1063 (8th Cir. 2005) (imposition of a mandatory life sentence based on sentencing court’s finding that the defendant had two prior drug trafficking convictions did not violate rule of *Apprendi*); *United States v. Harris*, 741 F.3d 1245, 1249 (11th Cir. 2014) (district court’s imposition of mandatory life sentence did not violate *Alleyne* or *Apprendi*).

Higher penalty ranges also apply if death or serious bodily injury results from use of the controlled substance. *See* 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b) and 960(b).

Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466, 490 (2000), held that “[o]ther than the fact of a prior conviction, any fact that increases the penalty for a crime beyond the prescribed statutory maximum must be submitted to a jury, and proved beyond a reasonable doubt.” The Court applied *Apprendi* to the federal sentencing guidelines in *United States v. Booker*, reaffirming that “[a]ny fact (other than a prior conviction) which is necessary to support a sentence exceeding the maximum authorized by the facts established by a plea of guilty or a jury verdict must be admitted by the defendant or proved to a jury beyond a reasonable doubt.” 543 U.S. 220, 244 (2005). The Supreme Court remedied this constitutional violation by rendering the sentencing guidelines advisory in nature.²

Following *Apprendi*, circuits were split regarding whether this rule also applied to facts that increase the mandatory minimum sentence. Prior to *Apprendi*, the Supreme Court had ruled in *Harris v. United States*, 536 U.S. 545 (2002), that the Constitution does not require facts that increase a mandatory minimum sentence to be determined by a jury. The Supreme Court overruled *Harris* in *Alleyne v. United States*, 570 U.S. 99 (2013), however, holding that “any fact that increases the mandatory minimum is an ‘element’ that must be submitted to the jury.” For further discussion, see Section IX, Part A.

² In *Booker*, the Supreme Court excised 18 U.S.C. § 3553(b)(1), which made the guidelines binding on the sentencing court, and § 3742(e), which required *de novo* review of sentences on appeal. *Booker*, 543 U.S. at 258.

C. LESSER OFFENSES

Other statutes with lower statutory penalty ranges include:

21 U.S.C. §§ 841(c), 841(f), 960(d). Offenses involving listed chemicals have statutory maximums ranging from one year to 20 years. There are no mandatory minimum or enhancement provisions.

21 U.S.C. § 843(a)(6). Possession of a listed chemical with intent to manufacture a controlled substance has a four-year maximum sentence with additional penalty provisions applicable to subsequent violations and methamphetamine manufacturing.

21 U.S.C. § 843(b) (“phone count”). Using a communication facility to commit a drug trafficking offense has a four-year maximum sentence. There is a “doubling” provision and additional penalty provisions.

21 U.S.C. § 844. Simple possession is a misdemeanor, with enhancement provisions.

21 U.S.C. § 856 (Maintaining drug-involved premises) has a 20-year maximum sentence. There are no mandatory minimum or enhancement provisions.

III. CHAPTER TWO OFFENSE GUIDELINE SECTIONS

A. APPLICABLE OFFENSE GUIDELINE SECTION IS DRIVEN BY OFFENSE OF CONVICTION

The applicable Chapter Two offense guideline section is determined by looking up the **offense of conviction** in Appendix A (Statutory Index). See USSG §1B1.2 (Applicable Guidelines).

For example, if a defendant was charged with distributing drugs near a school in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 860, but was convicted only of possession with intent to distribute drugs in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841(a), (b)(1), apply §2D1.1 (applicable to 21 U.S.C. § 841(a), (b)(1)), not §2D1.2 (applicable to 21 U.S.C. § 860).

For purposes of determining which offense guideline section is applicable where the Statutory Index specifies the use of more than one section for the offense of conviction, use the offense guideline section for the most specific definition of the offense of conviction.

For example, if the defendant was convicted of § 841(a), (b)(4), use §2D2.1 (Unlawful Possession; Attempt or Conspiracy), not §2D1.1 (Unlawful Manufacturing, Importing, Exporting, or Trafficking (Including Possession with Intent to Commit These Offenses); Attempt or Conspiracy), because while § 841(a) contains general language prohibiting drug

trafficking, § 841(b)(4) provides the more specific penalties for distribution of a small amount of marijuana for no remuneration, which is to be treated as simple possession.

B. SECTION 2D1.1 (UNLAWFUL MANUFACTURING, IMPORTING, EXPORTING, OR TRAFFICKING (INCLUDING POSSESSION WITH INTENT TO COMMIT THESE OFFENSES); ATTEMPT OR CONSPIRACY))³

For the most widely used code sections in drug cases—21 U.S.C. § 841(a) and (b)(1) (and conspiracy under § 846 to violate § 841(a) and (b)(1))—Appendix A specifies offense guideline §2D1.1. Additionally, §2D1.1 is often used as a result of a cross-reference from other Chapter Two sections (e.g., §§2K2.1(c)(1), 2S1.1(a)(1)).

1. Determining the Base Offense Level

Under §2D1.1, unless the defendant is convicted of an offense that establishes death or serious bodily injury, the type and quantity of drugs for which the defendant is held responsible will be the most important factor in determining his sentence.

To the extent that a fact other than a prior conviction (such as death or serious bodily injury, drug type, or drug quantity) increases a defendant's otherwise applicable statutory maximum or mandatory minimum sentence beyond the sentence authorized by the offense of conviction, such a fact must be submitted to a jury and proved beyond a reasonable doubt, or admitted to by the defendant. *See Apprendi v. New Jersey*, 530 U.S. 466 (2000) (statutory maximums); *Alleyne v. United States*, 570 U.S. 99 (2013) (mandatory minimums). But factual findings made for the purposes of applying the sentencing guidelines that do not increase the applicable statutory maximum or mandatory minimum sentence do not violate this rule. For further discussion, see Section IX, Part A.

a. Drug Quantity Table

If the offense of conviction does not establish that death or serious bodily injury resulted from use of the substance, the base offense level specified in the Drug Quantity Table applies. *See* USSG §2D1.1(a)(5), (c).

Note regarding the 2018 Amendment replacing the term “marihuana equivalency” in the Drug Quantity Table. In a technical amendment promulgated on April 12, 2018, the Commission replaced the term “marihuana equivalency,” which is used in the Drug Equivalency Tables for determining penalties for controlled substances that are not specifically referenced in the Drug Quantity Table or when combining differing controlled

³ The specific offense characteristics at §2D1.1 and the application notes that follow are occasionally renumbered when the guideline is amended. The designations used in this primer were in effect at the time of its publication. Case citations may reflect pre-amendment designations of specific offense characteristics or application notes.

substances, with the new term “converted drug weight.” See USSG App. C, amend. 808 (effective Nov. 1, 2018). The revision is the result of concern that the term “marihuana equivalency” could be misleading and result in confusion. In addition, the amendment added the new term “converted drug weight” to all provisions of the Drug Quantity Table at §2D1.1(c), changed the title of the “Drug Equivalency Tables” to “Drug Conversion Tables,” and made technical changes throughout the *Guidelines Manual* to account for the new term. This amendment was not intended as a substantive change in policy for §2D1.1.

Note regarding the 2014 Amendment to the Drug Quantity Table. Effective November 1, 2014, the Commission amended the Drug Quantity Table to reduce by two levels the offense levels assigned to the quantities that trigger the statutory mandatory minimum penalties, resulting in corresponding guideline ranges that include the mandatory minimum penalties (rather than guideline ranges that are above the mandatory minimum penalties). The amendment also adjusted the offense levels downward two levels for quantities above and below the mandatory minimum threshold quantities, except that it retained the minimum base offense level of six and the maximum base offense level of 38 for particular drug types. The amendment also made parallel changes to the quantity tables in §2D1.11 (Unlawfully Distributing, Importing, Exporting or Possessing a Listed Chemical; Attempt or Conspiracy). See USSG App. C, amend. 782 (effective Nov. 1, 2014). These reductions apply retroactively and took effect on November 1, 2015. See USSG App. C, amend. 788 (effective Nov. 1, 2014).⁴

b. Death or serious bodily injury

Subsections 2D1.1(a)(1)–(4) provide for enhanced base offense levels (**43, 38, 30, and 26**, respectively), if the defendant is convicted under 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1)(A), (b)(1)(B), or (b)(1)(C), or 21 U.S.C. § 960(b)(1), (b)(2), or (b)(3). The Supreme Court held that, “at least where use of the drug distributed by the defendant is not an independently sufficient cause of the victim’s death or serious bodily injury, a defendant cannot be liable under the penalty enhancement provision of 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1)(C) unless such use is a but-for cause of the death or injury.” *Burrage v. United States*, 134 S. Ct. 881, 892 (2014.)

- (i) *“Offense of Conviction.”* The Commission’s view is that the “offense of conviction” language limits the application of these offense levels to cases where death or serious bodily injury is proved beyond a reasonable doubt by plea or to the factfinder. See USSG App. C, amend. 123 (effective Nov. 1, 1989) (“[t]he purpose of this amendment [limiting the application of §2D1.1(a)(1), (a)(2)] is to provide that subsections (a)(1) and (a)(2) apply only in the case of a conviction

⁴ Detailed materials on the Commission’s 2014 drug guidelines amendments are available at <http://www.uscc.gov/policymaking/amendments/materials-2014-drug-guidelines-amendment>.

under circumstances specified in the statutes cited.”).⁵ Before *Alleyne*, the circuit courts applied *Apprendi* to address whether these enhancements may be applied after mere judicial fact finding. This resulted in a circuit split. After *Alleyne*, the Seventh Circuit held that “§2D1.1(a)(2) applies only when a resulting death (or serious bodily injury) was an element of the crime of conviction, proven beyond a reasonable doubt or admitted by the defendant.” *United States v. Lawler* 818 F.3d 281, 285 (7th Cir. 2016). For more information about this circuit split, see Section V, Part C.

- (ii) **“Serious Bodily Injury.”** For the increased offense levels under §2D1.1(a)(1)–(4) to apply, the offense of conviction must establish that death or serious bodily injury resulted from the use of the substance. The definition of “serious bodily injury” found in §1B1.1, comment. (n.1(M)) differs from the statutory definition under 21 U.S.C. § 802(25). Courts have not addressed whether the “serious bodily injury” enhancement under §2D1.1(a)(1)–(4) is triggered by the guideline definition or the statutory definition. However, one court noted in an unpublished opinion that the Supreme Court has held a statutory definition should be given preference over a general guideline definition. See *United States v. Alvarez*, 165 F. App’x 707, 708–09 (11th Cir. 2006) (citing *United States v. LaBonte*, 520 U.S. 751, 757 (1997), and *Stinson v. United States*, 508 U.S. 36, 38 (1993)), for the propositions that the guidelines “must bow to the specific directives of Congress,” and “commentary in the Guidelines Manual that interprets or explains a guideline is authoritative unless it violates the Constitution or a federal statute,” respectively).
- (iii) **Violence Cross-References.** There are two cross-reference provisions that may apply when violence is involved in the drug crime. See discussion of §2D1.1(d)(1) (murder cross-reference) and (d)(2) (distribution of controlled substance with intent to commit a crime of violence cross reference) at Section III, Part D(1)–(2).

c. Mitigating Role Reduction

If the defendant receives a mitigating role adjustment under §3B1.2, the offense level determined by reference to the Drug Quantity Table is reduced pursuant to

⁵ Amendment 727 added §2D1.1(a)(3)–(4) as a response to the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008, Pub. L. 110–425, 122 Stat. 4820. “[T]he amendment addresses the sentencing enhancement added by the Act, which applies when the offense involved a Schedule III controlled substance and death or serious bodily injury resulted from the use of such substance.” The Amendment’s effective date was November 1, 2009.

§2D1.1(a)(5).⁶ This section provides a graduated reduction of two to four levels for offenders whose quantity level under §2D1.1 results in a base offense level of 32 or greater. See USSG §2D1.1(a)(5). If the resulting offense level is greater than 32 and the defendant receives the 4-level reduction at §3B1.2(a), the offense level is reduced to a maximum of 32 (i.e., “capped” at this offense level). The eligible defendant receives the 2- to 4-level downward role adjustment in addition to the reduced base offense level. See USSG §3B1.2, comment. (n.6).

2. Drug Type

The type of controlled substance makes a significant difference in the offense level. For example, the question of whether a substance is crack cocaine is often litigated because that substance generates relatively greater penalties.

a. Methods for determining drug type

- (i) Stipulation as to drug type by the parties in the plea agreement may be sufficient.* See *United States v. Johnson*, 396 F.3d 902, 904 (7th Cir. 2005) (collecting cases as to enforceable stipulations, including drug type); *United States v. Roman*, 121 F.3d 136, 141 n.4 (3d Cir. 1997); *Cf. United States v. Kang*, 143 F.3d 379, 381 (8th Cir. 1998) (provision of plea agreement indicating that the “United States submits” that offense involved more than 50 grams of crack cocaine was not stipulation by the defendant that was binding at sentencing). A district court may also rely on admissions to the court by a defendant during a guilty plea colloquy. See *United States v. Rosado-Perez*, 605 F.3d 48, 57 (1st Cir. 2010); *United States v. James*, 78 F.3d 851, 856 (3d Cir. 1996); *United States v. Faulks*, 143 F.3d 133, 139 (3d Cir. 1998); *but see United States v. Garrett*, 189 F.3d 610, 612 (7th Cir. 1999) (stipulation and admission were insufficient).
- (ii) Where the controlled substance is available, identity can be determined through chemical analysis.* See *United States v. Wilson*, 103 F.3d 1402, 1407 (8th Cir. 1997) (finding that chemist’s testimony identifying substance as cocaine base without referring to “crack” was sufficient to

⁶ Amendment 794, effective November 1, 2015, resolved a circuit split and clarified that the “average participant”, which a defendant is compared to in determining a minor role, is a person who actually participated in the criminal activity at issue in the defendant’s case, and not the universe of persons participating in similar crimes. As a clarifying amendment, it applies to cases on direct appeal. *United States v. Quintero-Leyva*, 823 F.3d 519 (9th Cir. 2016). The amendment was the result of Commission studies’ finding that the mitigating role adjustment is applied inconsistently and more sparingly than it intended. In drug cases, specifically, the Commission determined the adjustment is applied inconsistently to drug defendants who performed similar low-level functions, and that rates of application varied widely from district to district.

support the defendant's sentence, because the guidelines define cocaine base as crack cocaine); *United States v. Alfeche*, 942 F.2d 697, 698 (9th Cir. 1991) (per curiam) (court relied on unchallenged chemical analysis to determine identity of substance). Crack cocaine is a form of cocaine base; usually, a chemist will testify in terms of whether the substance is "cocaine base," while lay witnesses will testify that the substance is "crack cocaine." *United States v. Richardson*, 225 F.3d 46, 50 (1st Cir. 2000); *United States v. Waters*, 313 F.3d 151, 156 (3d Cir. 2002); *United States v. Dukes*, 139 F.3d 469, 474 (5th Cir. 1998).

(iii) *All of seized substance need not be analyzed to determine identity.*

District courts may rely on random sampling for identification purposes. See *United States v. Dent*, 149 F.3d 180, 191 (3d Cir. 1998); *United States v. Fitzgerald*, 89 F.3d 218, 223 n.5 (5th Cir. 1996) (random sampling is generally accepted as a method of identifying entire substance whose quantity has been measured); *United States v. Jackson*, 470 F.3d 299, 310–11 (6th Cir. 2006) (same); *United States v. Roach*, 28 F.3d 729, 735 (8th Cir. 1994) (same); *United States v. Madkour*, 930 F.2d 234 (2d Cir. 1991) (in determining identity, court properly relied on lab results of randomly sampled marijuana plants and testimony from an experienced agent that all of the plants were marijuana).

(iv) *It is not essential that crack cocaine contain sodium bicarbonate.* Even though the guidelines define "crack" cocaine as a form of cocaine base usually prepared by processing cocaine hydrochloride and sodium bicarbonate, see §2D1.1(c), Note (D), evidence need not be established that the substance contains sodium bicarbonate before a court can conclude the drug was in fact crack. See *United States v. Diaz*, 176 F.3d 52, 119 (2d Cir. 1999); *United States v. Waters*, 313 F.3d 151, 156 (3d Cir. 2002); *United States v. Jones*, 159 F.3d 969, 982–83 (6th Cir. 1998); *United States v. Abdul*, 122 F.3d 477, 479 (7th Cir. 1997); *United States v. Stewart*, 122 F.3d 625, 628 (8th Cir. 1997); *United States v. Brooks*, 161 F.3d 1240, 1248 (10th Cir. 1998).⁷

(v) *Government need not perform chemical analysis, but may rely on lay testimony and circumstantial evidence to establish identity.* See *United States v. Gibbs*, 190 F.3d 188, 220 (3d Cir. 1999); see also *United States v. Bryce*, 208 F.3d 346, 353–54 (2d Cir. 1999) (circumstantial evidence sufficient to establish identity of substance may include physical appearance, substance produced expected effects when sampled by someone familiar with illicit drug, substance used in same manner as illicit drug, high price was paid in cash for substance, transactions were

⁷ See also the discussion concerning the definition of "cocaine base" at Section III, Part E(1)(b).

carried on with secrecy or deviousness, and substance was called by name of illegal narcotic by defendant or others in his presence); *United States v. Dominguez*, 992 F.2d 678, 681 (7th Cir. 1993) (circumstantial evidence may include sales price consistent with that of controlled substance, covert nature of sale, on-the-scene remarks by conspirator identifying substance as a drug, lay experience based on familiarity through prior use, trading, or law enforcement, and behavior characteristic of drug sales); *United States v. Walker*, 688 F.3d 416, 423–24 (8th Cir. 2012) (district court properly relied on testimony of co-conspirators that methamphetamine was “ice” based on its appearance, form, price, and quality).

Because no chemical test can distinguish between cocaine base and crack cocaine, it is sufficient for a court to rely on the testimony of “those who spend their lives and livelihoods enmeshed with the drug-users, dealers, and law enforcement officers who specialize in narcotics crimes.” See *United States v. Stephenson*, 557 F.3d 449, 453 (7th Cir. 2009); see also *United States v. Brown*, 332 F.3d 363, 376 (6th Cir. 2003) (challenged sentence affirmed where sentencing court relied on trial testimony that cocaine purchased from defendant was cooked into crack cocaine, and that drugs seized from co-conspirators were crack cocaine); *United States v. Taylor*, 116 F.3d 269, 273–74 (7th Cir. 1997) (drug supplier, purchasers, and assistants testified that substance was crack); *United States v. Cantley*, 130 F.3d 1371, 1378–79 (10th Cir. 1997) (multiple police officers and lay witnesses who purchased substance from, or sold substance to, defendant testified that substance was crack); *United States v. Roman*, 121 F.3d 136, 140–41 (3d Cir. 1997) (affirming sentence where district court relied on task force officer’s testimony that the substance seized from the defendant was crack cocaine based upon his years of experience as a police officer); *United States v. Dent*, 149 F.3d 180, 189–90 (3d Cir. 1998) (same).

b. “Mixture or substance”

The drug types listed in the Drug Quantity Table correspond generally to those specifically listed in 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1), although the Drug Quantity Table lists more specific drug types.

In most circumstances, “mixture or substance” as used in the Drug Quantity Table has the same meaning as in section 841(b)(1). See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.1). That is, a mixture need contain only a detectable amount of a controlled substance for the entire mixture to be considered that controlled substance. If a mixture or substance contains more than one controlled substance, the weight of the entire mixture or substance is

assigned to the controlled substance that results in the greater offense level. See USSG §2D1.1(c), Note (A).

c. Using the Drug Conversion Tables

Note regarding the 2018 Amendment replacing the term “marihuana equivalency” in the Drug Equivalency Tables. As noted above, the Commission in April 2018 promulgated a technical amendment to replace the term “marihuana equivalency” with the term “converted drug weight” in the Drug Equivalency Tables. In addition, the amendment added the new term “converted drug weight” to all provisions of the Drug Quantity Table at §2D1.1(c), changed the title of the “Drug Equivalency Tables” to “Drug Conversion Tables,” and made technical changes throughout the *Guidelines Manual* to account for the new term.

For drugs not specifically listed in the Drug Quantity Table, you must calculate the converted drug weight by referring to the Drug Conversion Tables. Apply the base offense level for the resulting converted drug weight, subject to the minimum base offense levels and maximum converted drug weights provided in the tables. See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.8).

For example, if a case involves opium (a Schedule II opiate),⁸ do not apply the base offense level for heroin. Instead, convert the opium to the corresponding converted drug weight by using the Drug Conversion Table. Compare 1 gram of opium (50 gm of converted drug weight), with 1 gram of heroin (1 kg of converted drug weight).

“Converted drug weight” is a guidelines term of art. Conversion ratios are not necessarily pharmacological equivalents. See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.8(B)).

d. Analogues/drugs not listed in guideline

Note regarding the 2018 Amendment adding new substances to the Drug Equivalency Tables. In an amendment promulgated on April 12, 2018, the Commission revised the Drug Equivalency Tables to make a number of changes regarding synthetic drugs. The amendment adopted a new definition of “fentanyl analogue” as “any substance (including any salt, isomer, or salt of isomer), whether a controlled substance or not, that has a chemical structure that is similar to fentanyl (N-phenyl-N-[1-(2-phenylethyl)-4-piperidinyl] propanamide).” The definition is intended to create a class of fentanyl analogues identical to that already created by statute, clarify the legal confusion that has resulted from the current definition of “analogue” in §2D1.1, and reaffirm that fentanyl analogues are treated differently than fentanyl under the guidelines as well as the statute. In addition, the amendment created an entry in the Drug Conversion Tables for the class of

⁸ Schedules of controlled substances are revised regularly. See 21 U.S.C. § 812 (Schedules of controlled substances). Current schedules are published in the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1308 of Title 21, Food and Drugs. See also <https://www.dea/diversion.usdoj.gov/schedules/>.

synthetic cathinones, providing a converted drug weight ratio of 380 grams, and applied a minimum base offense level of 12 to the class of synthetic cathinones. It also created an entry in the Drug Conversion Tables for the class of synthetic cannabinoids, providing a converted drug weight ratio of 167 grams, and applied a minimum base offense level of 12 to the class of synthetic cannabinoids. *See* USSG App. C, amend. 807 (effective Nov. 1, 2018).⁹

In cases involving a drug analogue or a drug not listed in either the Drug Quantity Table or the Drug Conversion Tables, apply the offense level for the most analogous drug. *See* USSG §§2D1.1, comment. (n.6); §2X5.1. Courts should, to the extent practicable, consider whether the chemical structure of the analogue/unlisted drug is substantially similar to a drug listed in the guideline; whether the stimulant, depressant, or hallucinogenic effect of the analogue/unlisted drug is substantially similar to a drug listed in the guideline; and whether a lesser or greater quantity of the analogue/unlisted drug is needed to produce substantially the same effect as a drug listed in the guidelines. USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.6(A)-(C)).

e. List I chemicals

The List I Chemical Equivalency Table applies only in the limited circumstances where the defendant, or someone for whose conduct the defendant is accountable under the relevant conduct rules of §1B1.3(a), manufactured or attempted to manufacture a controlled substance. *Cf.* USSG §2D1.11, comment. (n.8) (limiting the §2D1.11(c) cross reference).

f. Drug equivalencies—more than one drug¹⁰

In addition to providing equivalencies for drugs that are not listed in the Drug Quantity Table, the Drug Equivalency Table also provides a means for combining different drugs. *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.8(B)). Where an offense involves more than one drug, convert each drug to the converted drug weight, add the resulting weights, and look up the total converted drug weight in the Drug Quantity Table. *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.8(B),(C)).

⁹ As explained in this section, for substances that do not appear in either the Drug Quantity Table or the Drug Equivalency Table, USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.6) provides courts the process for calculating drug quantities. Because Commission data indicated that the majority of cases relying on the Application Note 6 process involved certain fentanyl analogues, synthetic cathinones, and synthetic cannabinoids, the Commission adopted this amendment to alleviate the burden associated with its application.

¹⁰ *See supra* notes of this primer regarding 2018 amendments replacing the term “marihuana equivalency” with the term “converted drug weight” in subsections (B)(1)(a) and (B)(2)(c).

3. Drug Quantity

For most drug-related sentences, quantity is the most important consideration. Drug quantity determinations do not necessarily correspond to the amounts charged in the offense of conviction. A defendant will be held responsible for drug quantities involved in his or her “relevant conduct,” which may include a defendant’s own acts as well as the acts of others. *See* USSG §1B1.3. The sentencing guidelines hold the defendant accountable for the “reasonably foreseeable acts and omissions of others” in furtherance of “jointly undertaken criminal activity,” which includes any “criminal plan, scheme, endeavor or enterprise undertaken by defendant in concert with others.” USSG §1B1.3(a)(1)(B).

A defendant will be held responsible for all reasonably foreseeable acts and omissions of others in furtherance of the jointly undertaken criminal activity that occurred during the commission of the offense of conviction, in preparation for that offense, or in the course of attempting to avoid detection or responsibility for that offense. *Id.* In the case of controlled substances, the defendant is responsible for “all reasonably foreseeable quantities of contraband that were within the scope of the criminal activity that he jointly undertook.” USSG App. C, amend. 790 (effective Nov. 1, 2015). *See United States v. Rodriguez*, 731 F.3d 20, 28 (1st Cir. 2013); *United States v. Laboy*, 351 F.3d 578, 582 (1st Cir. 2003).

a. Methods for determining quantity

Issues of quantity may often be wholly dependent on co-conspirator testimony, the credibility of which is left to the district court. *United States v. Candie*, 974 F.2d 61, 64 (8th Cir. 1992) (noting that determination of drug quantity based on witness credibility is “virtually unreviewable on appeal,” including, as in this case, a co-conspirator); *United States v. Angel*, 355 F.3d 462, 474 (6th Cir. 2004) (same); *United States v. Milan*, 398 F.3d 445, 457 (6th Cir. 2005) (district court’s reliance on proffer statements of codefendants in calculating drug quantity attributable to defendant was not unreasonable when it was not obvious that statements were untruthful); *United States v. Sampson*, 140 F.3d 585, 592 (4th Cir. 1998) (direct or hearsay testimony of lay eyewitnesses as to the amounts attributable to the defendant can provide sufficiently reliable evidence of quantity); *United States v. Fudge*, 325 F.3d 910, 922–23 (7th Cir. 2003) (court relied on co-conspirators’ testimony to determine quantity); *United States v. Matthews*, 168 F.3d 1234, 1247–48 (11th Cir. 1999) (same); *United States v. Rodriguez*, 398 F.3d 1291, 1297 (11th Cir. 2005) (calculation of drug amount that included co-conspirator’s estimates of number of times defendant transported methylenedioxyamphetamine and average amount of tablets transported each time was supported by a preponderance of the evidence). Where witnesses’ estimates of drug amounts are uncertain, however, a district court is well advised to sentence at the low end of the range to which the witness testified. *See Sampson*, 140 F.3d 585, 592.

- (i) *Where there is no drug seizure or the amount seized does not reflect the scale of the offense, the court should approximate the quantity.* See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.5). See also *United States v. Jeross*, 521 F.3d 562, 576–77 (6th Cir. 2008); *United States v. Betancourt*, 422 F.3d 240, 246–47 (5th Cir. 2005); *United States v. Lopes-Montes*, 165 F.3d 730, 732 (9th Cir. 1999); *United States v. Jarrett*, 133 F.3d 519, 529 (7th Cir. 1998); *United States v. Newton*, 31 F.3d 611, 614 (8th Cir. 1994).
- (ii) *District courts have used a variety of methods to approximate quantity including:* (1) determining the production capacity of a laboratory based on the amount of precursor drug found in a defendant’s possession; (2) determining the production capacity of a laboratory based on the size and capability of the laboratory; (3) converting seized cash or drug notations into drug amounts; and (4) extrapolating the volume of a defendant’s drug trafficking from evidence of the defendant’s or similarly situated defendant’s actual trafficking. See *United States v. Mahaffey*, 53 F.3d 128, 132 (6th Cir. 1995) (court may approximate amount that laboratory could have produced based on yields of similarly-situated defendants); *United States v. Shaffer*, 993 F.2d 625, 627 (7th Cir. 1993) (court may approximate amount that laboratory could have produced based on DEA chemist’s testimony regarding chemical operations and materials found at drug lab and production capacity of defendant’s 12-liter flask when taking into account “sloppy” laboratory procedures); *United States v. Beshore*, 961 F.2d 1380, 1383 (8th Cir. 1992) (court may approximate amount that laboratory could have produced based on quantity of precursor chemicals, size of laboratory, and recipes to “cook” methamphetamine seized); *United States v. Lopes-Montes*, 165 F.3d 730, 731–32 (9th Cir. 1999) (court reasonably calculated the amount of pure methamphetamine that would have been delivered by defendant based on the purity of the delivered amount and the assumption that the negotiated remaining amount to be delivered would have the same purity); *United States v. Short*, 947 F.2d 1445, 1456–57 (10th Cir. 1991) (court may approximate amount that laboratory could have produced based on testimony of DEA chemist and characteristics of laboratory equipment seized); *United States v. Carroll*, 6 F.3d 735, 743 (11th Cir. 1993) (court properly used expert testimony about the chemicals acquired for use in the lab to approximate the conspiracy’s capacity for production of methamphetamine); *United States v. Almedina*, 686 F.3d 1312, 1317 (11th Cir. 2012) (court properly approximated both type and quantity of drug by extrapolating from the contents and price of one seized package to an earlier package); *but see United States v. Marquez*, 699 F.3d 556 (1st Cir. 2012) (while extrapolation is a common and permissible way to determine drug quantity, it must be based on

reliable estimates; broken and garbled telephone exchange that may have been mere boasting was insufficient).

- (iii) *The record should disclose evidence sufficient for a court to make a reasonable approximation of quantity.* *United States v. Marrero-Ortiz*, 160 F.3d 768, 780 (1st Cir. 1998) (“[Without] particularized findings to support the assigned [base offense level], we have no principled choice but to vacate the sentence and remand for further findings and resentencing.”); *United States v. Carreon*, 11 F.3d 1225, 1231 (5th Cir. 1994) (remanding for findings where appellate court is “left to second guess the basis for the district court’s calculation”); *United States v. Mahaffey*, 53 F.3d 128, 133 (6th Cir. 1995) (“[w]e have never approved a finding on the quantity of drugs attributable to a defendant when the record contains no evidence concerning the manner in which a precursor was converted to a controlled substance or the details of the laboratories involved”); *United States v. Hewitt*, 942 F.2d 1270, 1274 (8th Cir. 1991) (condemning use of “far reaching” averaging assumptions in estimating drug quantity); *United States v. Culps*, 300 F.3d 1069, 1076 (9th Cir. 2002) (district court must err on side of caution in approximating drug quantity); *United States v. Garcia*, 994 F.2d 1499, 1509 (10th Cir. 1993) (vacating sentence based on average size shipment of all marijuana traffickers rather than size of particular shipments of marijuana made by defendants); *United States v. Butler*, 41 F.3d 1435, 1447–48 (11th Cir. 1995) (remanding because sentencing court failed to articulate “a reliable method of quantifying the amount of drugs attributable to each appellant”).
- (iv) *A district court may rely on reasonable estimates and averages in arriving at its drug-quantity determinations, as long as the probable accuracy is founded on adequate indicia of reliability.* See *United States v. Krasinski*, 545 F.3d 546, 552–53 (7th Cir. 2008) (no clear error to rely on estimation of drug quantity based on ranges admitted by defendant, despite fact that more conservative estimate would have resulted in lower guideline range); *United States v. Dalton*, 409 F.3d 1247, 1251 (10th Cir. 2005) (upholding district court’s drug quantity estimation based on co-defendant’s testimony and corroborating evidence); *United States v. Flores*, 725 F.3d 1028, 1036–37 (9th Cir. 2013) (court properly used “multiplier method” by estimating length of conspiracy, number of pills sold by conspiracy per day, and tablet strength of pills); *but see United States v. Laboy*, 351 F.3d 578, 583 (1st Cir. 2003) (“rote multiplication of quantities from a *single* exchange is, taken alone, an improper method for determining overall drug quantities . . . especially . . . where an estimate of quantity is multiplied by an estimate of frequency”); *United States v. Rivera-Maldonado*, 194 F.3d 224, 229–31

(1st Cir. 1999) (sentence vacated where district court relied on testimony of agent regarding number of sales in a two-hour period and 12 controlled buys to extrapolate the total amounts of three drugs attributable to the defendant for a six-month indictment period); *United States v. Sepulveda*, 15 F.3d 1161, 1198 (1st Cir. 1993) (sentence vacated where trial testimony of co-conspirator on number of trips and quantities was “averaged” and multiplied); *United States v. Rosacker*, 314 F.3d 422, 426 (9th Cir. 2002) (PSR and forensic lab report contained no evidentiary support for drug quantities based on capability of the laboratory); *United States v. Shonubi*, 998 F.2d 84, 89–90 (2d Cir. 1993) (vacating, in the absence of other evidentiary support, district court’s drug quantity finding arrived at by rote multiplication of number of trips times quantity carried on one such trip); *United States v. Garcia*, 994 F.2d 1499, 1509 (10th Cir. 1993) (vacating defendant’s sentence and holding that averages, when used to arrive at drug quantity findings, must be “more than a guess”).

Note. The Second Circuit requires “specific evidence,” such as drug records, admissions, or live testimony, to prove a relevant conduct quantity of drugs for sentencing purposes. The evidence may be circumstantial—such as sampling—but must point to a specific drug quantity for which the defendant is responsible. *United States v. Tran*, 519 F.3d 98, 106 (2d Cir. 2008) (citing *Shonubi*, 998 F.2d at 89–90).

- (v) *A district court cannot quantify yield figures without regard for a particular defendant’s capabilities when viewed in light of the drug laboratory.* *United States v. Eschman*, 227 F.3d 886, 890–91 (7th Cir. 2000) (court should not rely on a theoretical yield analysis of 100 percent to extrapolate clandestine laboratory yield), *superseded by statute as stated in United States v. Martin*, 438 F.3d 621 (6th Cir. 2006); *United States v. Rosacker*, 314 F.3d 422, 427–28 (9th Cir. 2002) (sentencing court should consider the defendant’s ability to manufacture). *See also United States v. Cole*, 125 F.3d 654, 655 (8th Cir. 1997) (relevant inquiry is on what defendant, not “an average cook[, is] capable of yielding”); *United States v. Hamilton*, 81 F.3d 652, 653–55 (6th Cir. 1996) (rejecting standardized drug conversion formulas in favor of individualized assessment of defendant’s capabilities), *superseded by statute as stated in United States v. Martin*, 438 F.3d 621 (6th Cir. 2006); *United States v. Mahaffey*, 53 F.3d 128, 132–33 (6th Cir. 1995) (same); *Rosacker*, 314 F.3d at 429; *United States v. Anderson*, 236 F.3d 427, 430 (8th Cir. 2001) (evidence must be based not on theoretical yield but on what the particular defendant could produce); *United States v. Havens*, 910 F.2d 703, 706 (10th Cir. 1990) (“[t]he factual question is what each specific defendant could have actually

produced, not the theoretical maximum amount produceable [sic] from the chemicals involved.”); *United States v. Higgins*, 282 F.3d 1261, 1279–82 (10th Cir. 2002) (estimate by agent of quantity of seized controlled substances destroyed before trial is not sufficiently reliable for extrapolating clandestine laboratory yield).

- (vi) *The production capacity of a laboratory may be based on the amount of precursor drug found in a defendant’s possession.* Some courts permit quantity to be approximated by calculating the amount of controlled substance that could be produced from the amount of precursor chemicals seized. *United States v. Basinger*, 60 F.3d 1400, 1409 (9th Cir. 1995). Some courts have also permitted a district court to rely on expert testimony that estimates production capability, even when the expert had to assume the availability of precursor chemicals that were not seized or were found in short supply. *Id.*; *United States v. Becker*, 230 F.3d 1224, 1234–36 (10th Cir. 2000); *United States v. Smith*, 240 F.3d 927, 930–31 (11th Cir. 2001) (per curiam).
- (vii) *The production capacity of a laboratory may be determined by the size and capability of the laboratory.* *United States v. Shaffer*, 993 F.2d 625, 626–29 (7th Cir. 1993) (court may approximate amount that laboratory could have produced based upon DEA chemist’s testimony regarding chemical operations and materials found at drug lab and production capacity of defendant’s 12-liter flask when taking into account “sloppy” laboratory procedures); *United States v. Beshore*, 961 F.2d 1380, 1383 (8th Cir. 1992) (court may approximate amount that laboratory could have produced based upon quantity of precursor chemicals, size of laboratory, and recipes to “cook” methamphetamine seized); *United States v. Short*, 947 F.2d 1445, 1456–57 (10th Cir. 1991) (court may approximate amount that laboratory could have produced based upon testimony of DEA chemist and characteristics of laboratory equipment seized); *United States v. Williams*, 989 F.2d 1061, 1072–74 (9th Cir. 1993) (court permitted to rely on expert testimony that estimated production capability based on lab equipment, even though expert had to assume availability of precursor chemicals that were not seized or were found in short supply); *United States v. Kessler*, 321 F.3d 699, 703–04 (8th Cir. 2003) (court properly relied on chemist’s testimony regarding analyzed samples from defendant’s residence and from lab to approximate quantity).
- (viii) *Courts may convert money into quantities of drugs.* Where cash is seized and either no drug is seized or the amount seized does not reflect the scale of offense, a sentencing court may estimate the quantity of drugs by converting cash into its drug equivalent, provided it finds by a

preponderance that the cash was attributable to drug sales that are relevant conduct under §1B1.3. *See, e.g., United States v. Simmons*, 582 F.3d 730, 737 (7th Cir. 2009) (“[w]hen there is a sufficient basis to believe that cash found in a defendant’s possession was derived from drug sales, a court properly includes the drug equivalent of that cash in the drug-quantity calculation.”); *United States v. Hinson*, 585 F.3d 1328, 1340–41 (10th Cir. 2009) (search of methamphetamine trafficker’s car yielded over \$40,000, which was converted to a methamphetamine-equivalent of 1.5 kilograms); *United States v. Jackson*, 3 F.3d 506, 511 (1st Cir. 1993) (“[w]hen drug traffickers possess large amounts of cash in ready proximity to their drug supply, a reasonable inference may be drawn that the money represents drug profits.”).

- (ix) *Courts should be careful in their calculations to avoid double counting of both the proceeds and the narcotics themselves.* *See United States v. Eison*, 585 F.3d 552, 555 (1st Cir. 2009); *United States v. Sampson*, 140 F.3d 585, 592 (4th Cir. 1998).
- (x) *Courts have extrapolated from other money involved in the drug trade to arrive at a drug quantity.* *See United States v. Eke*, 117 F.3d 19, 22–24 (1st Cir. 1997) (court affirmed extrapolation of quantity from fees paid to couriers); *United States v. Bashara*, 27 F.3d 1174, 1181–82 (6th Cir. 1994) (amount of a wire transfer was converted into an equivalent amount of heroin), *overruled on other grounds as stated in United States v. Caseslorente*, 220 F.3d 727 (6th Cir. 2000).
- (xi) *Courts may extrapolate the volume of a defendant’s drug trafficking from evidence of actual trafficking.* *United States v. Lopes-Montes*, 165 F.3d 730, 731–32 (9th Cir. 1999) (court reasonably calculated amount of pure methamphetamine that would have been delivered by defendant based on purity of delivered amount and assumption that negotiated remaining amount to be delivered would have same purity). Courts have also used evidence such as drug ledgers or defendant’s admissions to determine quantity attributable to a defendant. *See e.g., United States v. Spiller*, 261 F.3d 683, 691 (7th Cir. 2001) (defendant held responsible for dealing 28 kilograms of crack cocaine based on evidence in handwritten ledgers belonging to defendant in which he recorded drug sales); *United States v. Lincoln*, 413 F.3d 716, 717 (8th Cir. 2005) (district court properly made drug quantity estimate based on defendant’s post-arrest admissions to police).

b. No evidence to refute quantity

Generally, where a defendant offers no evidence to refute the factual assertions in the presentence report as to the quantity of drugs attributable to him, whether because of his own acts or because such quantity falls within the scope of his jointly undertaken activity and was reasonably foreseeable, the district court may adopt those facts without further inquiry as long as the assertions are supported by sufficient indicia of reliability. *See United States v. Cyr*, 337 F.3d 96, 100 (1st Cir. 2003); *United States v. Solis*, 299 F.3d 420, 456 (5th Cir. 2002); *United States v. Barnett*, 989 F.2d 546, 553, n.6 (1st Cir. 1993); *United States v. Shelton*, 400 F.3d 1325, 1329–30 (11th Cir. 2005).

c. Entire weight

For most drugs, weight includes the entire weight of any mixture or substance containing a detectable amount of the controlled substance. *See Note (A) to the Drug Quantity Table*. Therefore, in most cases, the base offense level will be set by this entire weight.

d. Actual weight

The purity of a controlled substance is relevant for guideline calculations in a limited number of cases, specifically for offenses involving PCP, amphetamine, methamphetamine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone. For offenses involving these controlled substances, the actual weight of the controlled substance is used to determine the base offense level. *See Note (B) to the Drug Quantity Table*.

Also, when applying the Drug Quantity Table, drug weight does not include materials that must be separated from the controlled substance before the controlled substance can be used. *See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.1)*. *See also Section III, Part E* for discussion of marijuana, methamphetamine, and LSD.

e. Methods for determining purity

Generally, purity is determined by laboratory testing. *See, e.g., United States v. Verdin-Garcia*, 516 F.3d 884, 896 (10th Cir. 2008) (“[l]aboratory test results are perhaps more persuasive evidence of amounts and purities than eyewitness testimony or wiretapped conversations, but [the latter] are not unreliable as a matter of law.”). *See also United States v. Eli*, 379 F.3d 1016, 1021 (D.C. Cir. 2004) (rejecting defendant’s argument that a substance was too impure to be considered crack and too contaminated to be usable).

- (i) *When no drugs have been recovered, court may not assume that the quantities defendant admitted to agent were “actual methamphetamine quantities.”* In a case where no drugs were recovered and no expert testified as to the typical purity of methamphetamine manufactured, district court erred in assuming that quantities defendant admitted to agent were actual methamphetamine. *United States v. Houston*, 338 F.3d 876, 881 (8th Cir. 2003) (“[w]hen a lay person is asked in general terms how much methamphetamine he helped someone else cook, his answer will almost certainly be in terms of the size of the resulting mixture, not the net weight of one of its components.”). Absent evidence to the contrary, a court may assume purity of unrecovered drugs from purity of recovered substances. *United States v. Newton*, 31 F.3d 611, 614 (8th Cir. 1994); *United States v. Lopes-Montes*, 165 F.3d 730, 731–32 (9th Cir. 1999).
- (ii) *Purity can also be relevant for departure purposes.* Particularly when heroin is involved, courts may depart because an unusually high purity is indicative of a defendant’s position or role in a drug distribution chain. See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.27(C)); see *United States v. Doe*, 149 F.3d 634, 640 (7th Cir. 1998); *United States v. Legarda*, 17 F.3d 496, 501–02 (1st Cir. 1994) (high purity of cocaine justified an upward departure). Some courts have held, however, that Application Note 27 does not authorize a court to depart based on the *low* purity of drugs. See, e.g., *United States v. Beltran*, 122 F.3d 1156, 1159–60 (8th Cir. 1997) (rejecting departure based on purity of methamphetamine); *United States v. Benish*, 5 F.3d 20, 27–28 (3d Cir. 1993) (court did not have discretion to depart downward based on age and sex of marijuana plants; guidelines focus exclusively on number of plants, indicating that Sentencing Commission considered and rejected all other factors). See generally *United States v. Berroa-Medrano*, 303 F.3d 277, 280 n.3 (3d Cir. 2002) (“Given the Sentencing Commission’s omission of any discussion of a *downward* departure for *low* drug purity, some courts have decided that a downward departure is permissible while others have disagreed.” *Comparing United States v. Mikaelian*, 168 F.3d 380, 390 (9th Cir.1999) (“the low purity of heroin involved in a crime cannot be categorically excluded as a basis for a downward departure”), with *United States v. Upthegrove*, 974 F.2d 55, 56–57 (7th Cir.1992) (“downward departure based on the low quality of the relevant drug is improper” partly because the Application Notes contain “no corresponding provision suggesting a downward departure for low quality drugs.”).

C. SELECTED SPECIFIC OFFENSE CHARACTERISTICS

1. §2D1.1(b)(1)

2-level enhancement if a dangerous weapon (including a firearm) was possessed

a. Constructive possession

Circuit courts have upheld the weapons enhancement for possession of a weapon in connection with a drug offense, even if the possession was only constructive. *See United States v. Rea*, 621 F.3d 595, 606 (7th Cir. 2010) (“[t]he defendant need not have actual possession of the weapon; constructive possession is sufficient”) (internal citations omitted); *United States v. Renteria-Saldana*, 755 F.3d 856, 859 (8th Cir. 2014) (as one who possessed key to stash house and paid bills, defendant had dominion over area where gun was found, he regularly accessed place where gun was found, and it was reasonable to infer he knew about loaded gun).

b. Relationship to drug offense

Application of §2D1.1(b)(1) requires a showing of a temporal and spatial relationship between the weapon, the drug trafficking activity, and the defendant. *See United States v. Ruiz*, 621 F.3d 390, 396 (5th Cir. 2010) (“[t]he Government bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant possessed the weapon and may do so by showing ‘that a temporal and spatial relation existed between the weapon, the drug trafficking activity, and the defendant,’ which suffices to establish that the defendant personally possessed the weapon,” quoting *United States v. Cisneros-Gutierrez*, 517 F.3d 751, 764–65 (5th Cir. 2008)); *United States v. Castro-Perez*, 749 F.3d 1209, 1211 (10th Cir. 2014) (court improperly applied enhancement because there was no physical relation between the weapon and the drug trafficking activity). The enhancement applies if the weapon was present, unless it is clearly improbable that the weapon was connected with the offense. *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.11(A)). The enhancement applies if the weapon was present at any point in the offense or during relevant conduct for which the defendant is responsible. *See* USSG §1B1.3(a)(1).

c. Co-conspirator’s possession of a firearm

Pursuant to §1B1.3(a)(1)(B), it is also permissible to enhance a defendant’s sentence based on a co-conspirator’s possession of a weapon in connection with the drug trafficking offense. *See United States v. Villarreal*, 613 F.3d 1344, 1359 (11th Cir. 2010) (“[a] co-conspirator’s possession of a firearm may be attributed to the defendant for purposes of this enhancement if his possession of the firearm was reasonably foreseeable by the defendant, occurred while he was a member of the conspiracy, and was in furtherance of the conspiracy”). It is not necessary to prove that defendant knew of co-conspirator’s possession of the weapon, as long as co-conspirator’s possession was reasonably foreseeable and was connected to the conspiracy. *United States v. Woods*, 604 F.3d 286, 290

(6th Cir. 2010) (“[t]he government concedes that there is no evidence that defendant ever possessed a firearm himself or even was actually aware that the firearm was present. Under such circumstances, the possession of a firearm by a coconspirator must (1) be connected to the conspiracy and (2) be reasonably foreseeable”).

At least one circuit has found that, because firearms are tools of the trade in drug trafficking offenses, a co-conspirator’s possession of such is usually reasonably foreseeable. *United States v. Mena-Robles*, 4 F.3d 1026, 1036 (1st Cir. 1993) (“we often observe that firearms are common tools of the drug trade. Absent evidence of exceptional circumstances, we think it fairly inferable that a codefendant’s possession of a dangerous weapon is foreseeable to a defendant with reason to believe that their collaborative criminal venture includes an exchange of controlled substances for a large amount of cash,” quoting *United States v. Bianco*, 922 F.2d 910, 912 (1st Cir. 1991)); *United States v. Batista*, 684 F.3d 333 (2d Cir. 2012) (firearm enhancement appropriate in case of narcotics detective who aided illegal drug ring run by individual who kept gun; defendant was experienced narcotics detective well-aware that drug dealers are often armed who knew size and scope of drug dealer’s drug operation); *but see United States v. Block*, 705 F.3d 755, 764 (7th Cir. 2013) (clear error for court to rely on irrelevant facts to fill gap between what is known generally about drug industry’s use of firearms and particular circumstances of this drug conspiracy to determine whether firearms use was reasonably foreseeable to defendant); *United States v. Ramirez*, 783 F.3d 687, 691 (7th Cir. 2015) (“requirement of an individualized inquiry suggests that the scale, scope, and nature of the conspiracy, and the defendant’s role in it, should usually be considered when determining whether gun possession was reasonably foreseeable to the defendant.”).

d. Application of safety valve and firearm possession

A defendant who receives the 2-level firearm enhancement (§2D1.1(b)(1)) is *not* automatically ineligible for relief under §5C1.2, see discussion at Section IX, Part B.¹¹ However, when a defendant receives a 2-level enhancement under §2D1.1(b)(1) based on his own possession of a firearm, generally, he is ineligible for application of §5C1.2. See *United States v. Ruiz*, 621 F.3d 390, 397 (5th Cir. 2010); *United States v. Herrera*, 446 F.3d 283, 286 (2d Cir. 2006) (“[t]he district court did *not* assume that, because [defendant] incurred the two-level increase under §2D1.1(b)(1), he was automatically ineligible for the safety valve”) (emphasis in original). Cf. *United States v. Nelson*, 222 F.3d 545, 549–51 (9th Cir. 2000) (stating that to avoid an enhancement under §2D1.1(b)(1), the defendant must prove that it was clearly improbable he possessed a weapon in connection with the offense;

¹¹ In the Tenth Circuit, a defendant is precluded from receiving safety valve relief only where he actively possessed a firearm. See, e.g., *United States v. Zavalza-Rodriguez*, 379 F.3d 1182, 1188 (10th Cir. 2004) (“for purposes of §5C1.2 we look to the defendant’s own conduct in determining whether the defendant has established by a preponderance of the evidence that the weapon was not possessed ‘in connection with the offense’”).

however, he must only establish by a preponderance of the evidence that a weapon was not involved in order to receive the safety valve).

e. Co-conspirator’s possession and §2D1.1(b)(16)

In most circuits, a defendant who receives the 2-level enhancement based on a co-defendant’s possession of the firearm is not rendered ineligible for relief under §5C1.2 and the 2-level reduction under §2D1.1(b)(16). *See United States v. Delgado-Paz*, 506 F.3d 652, 655–56 (8th Cir. 2007) (“the circuits are unanimous in holding that possession of a weapon by a defendant’s co-conspirator does not render the defendant ineligible for safety-valve relief unless the government shows that the defendant induced the co-conspirator’s possession”) (collecting cases); *but see United States v. Johnson*, 344 F.3d 562, 565 (6th Cir. 2003) (defendant who received a 2-level sentence enhancement for possession of weapon based on co-defendant’s possession of weapon would be ineligible for safety valve reduction).

f. Burden of proof

Most circuits generally have held that once the government has shown by a preponderance of evidence possession of a weapon during the offense, the evidentiary burden shifts to the defendant to establish that it was clearly improbable that the weapon was connected to the offense. *See United States v. Anderson*, 452 F.3d 87, 90 (1st Cir. 2006) (“[t]he government has the initial burden of establishing ‘that a firearm possessed by the defendant was present during the commission of the offense.’ Once the government has made that showing, ‘the burden shifts to the defendant to persuade the factfinder that a connection between the weapon and the crime is clearly improbable’”) (internal citations omitted); *United States v. Napolitan*, 762 F.3d 297 (3d Cir. 2014) (same); *United States v. Peroceski*, 520 F.3d 886, 887 (8th Cir. 2008); *United States v. Davidson*, 409 F.3d 304, 312 (6th Cir. 2005); *United States v. Corral*, 324 F.3d 866, 872 (7th Cir. 2003).

g. Enhancement in 18 U.S.C. § 924(c) cases

Section 2D1.1(b)(1) should not be applied when a defendant is also sentenced for a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 924(c) because the sentence imposed for the firearms conviction accounts for the conduct that would underlie the enhancement. *See United States v. Fouse*, 578 F.3d 643, 654 (7th Cir. 2009) (citing USSG §2K2.4, comment. (n.4)); *Cf. United States v. Chavez*, 549 F.3d 119, 132–33 (2d Cir. 2008) (noting that had defendant not been convicted of the § 924(c) offense, his drug conviction’s sentence would have been enhanced two levels pursuant to §2D1.1(b)(1)). *See also United States v. Aquino*, 242 F.3d 859, 864 (9th Cir. 2001) (addressing the inapplicability of §2D1.1(b)(1)’s 2-level enhancement for possession of a dangerous firearm when the defendant is convicted of a § 924(c) offense).

2. Section 2D1.1(b)(2)

2-level enhancement if the defendant used violence, made a credible threat to use violence, or directed the use of violence

Application Note 11(B) explains that §2D1.1(b)(1) and (b)(2) may be applied cumulatively. In a case where the defendant possessed a dangerous weapon but did not use violence, make a credible threat to use violence, or direct violence, however, subsection (b)(2) would not apply. *See, e.g., United States v. Pineda-Duarte*, 933 F.3d 519 (6th Cir. 2019) (vacating and remanding for the district court to determine whether the defendant intended to threaten, or actually used violence against, law enforcement authorities by swinging a shovel in their direction). Note also that a sentence under §2K2.4 accounts for conduct that would subject the defendant to an enhancement under (b)(2). In such a case, §2D1.1(b)(2) is not applicable. *See* USSG §2K2.4, comment. (n.4).

3. Section 2D1.1(b)(5)

2-level enhancement if the offense involved the importation of amphetamine or methamphetamine and the defendant does not receive a mitigating role adjustment

The enhancement does not apply if a defendant receives the adjustment from §2D1.1(b)(3) (related to importing or exporting by means of an aircraft or vessel). *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.12). Circuits have held that subsection (b)(5) is not limited to “only those defendants who themselves transport methamphetamine across the border[.]” *United States v. Perez-Oliveros*, 479 F.3d 779, 784 (11th Cir. 2007). “The scope of actions that ‘involve the importation of drugs’ is larger than the scope of those that constitute the actual importation.” *United States v. Rodriguez*, 666 F.3d 944, 946 (5th Cir. 2012).

In *United States v. Serfass*, 684 F.3d 548, 553 (5th Cir. 2012), the Fifth Circuit held that the plain language of §2D1.1(b)(5) supported the conclusion that the enhancement applied to “a defendant who possesses methamphetamine that had itself been unlawfully imported” regardless of whether he or she had actual knowledge of the importation. However, the Ninth Circuit in *United States v. Job*, 871 F.3d 852, 871–72 (9th Cir. 2017) declined to adopt the Fifth Circuit’s conclusion.

4. Section 2D1.1(b)(7)

2-level enhancement if the defendant, or a person for whose relevant conduct the defendant is accountable, distributed a controlled substance through mass marketing by means of an interactive computer service

“Mass-marketing by means of an interactive computer service” means the solicitation, by means of an interactive computer service, of a large number of persons to induce those persons to purchase a controlled substance. *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment.

(n.13). “Interactive computer service” has the meaning given that term in 47 U.S.C. § 230(f)(2). *Id.*

5. Section 2D1.1(b)(11)

2-level enhancement if the defendant bribed, or attempted to bribe, a law enforcement officer to facilitate the commission of a drug trafficking offense

Application Note 16 provides that subsection (b)(11) does not apply if the purpose of the bribery was to obstruct or impede the investigation, prosecution, or sentencing of the defendant because such conduct is covered by §3C1.1.

6. Section 2D1.1(b)(12)

2-level enhancement if the defendant maintained a premises for the purpose of manufacturing or distributing a controlled substance

Application Note 17 lists among the factors the court should consider in applying the enhancement: (A) whether the defendant held a possessory interest in (*e.g.*, owned or rented) the premises and (B) the extent to which the defendant controlled access to, or activities at, the premises. The application note explains that manufacturing or distributing drugs need not be the sole purpose for which the premises are maintained, but must be one of the primary or principal uses of the premises. *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n17); *see also United States v. Miller*, 698 F.3d 699, 707 (8th Cir. 2012) (§2D1.1(b)(12) applies when defendant uses premises for purpose of substantial drug-trafficking activities, even if premises was also her family home at the times in question); *United States v. Johnson*, 737 F.3d 444, 447–48 (6th Cir. 2013) (enhancement proper where defendant maintained at least one room in home for purpose of storing marijuana for later distribution); *United States v. Renteria-Saldana*, 755 F.3d 856, 859 (8th Cir. 2014) (although defendant did not own or reside at stash house, he exercised control over it and operated his drug-dealing business from premises); *United States v. Jones*, 778 F.3d 375 (1st Cir. 2015) (enhancement can apply even if defendant does not own or rent premises in his name; defendant also need not control access to premises to the exclusion of all others); *United States v. Lord*, 915 F.3d 1009 (5th Cir. 2019) (enhancement did not apply because defendant lacked ownership or control over the premises, even though he stored a pill press and met with someone on the premises to produce pills).

7. Section 2D1.1(b)(13)

4-level enhancement if the defendant knowingly misrepresented or knowingly marketed as another substance a mixture or substance containing fentanyl or a fentanyl analogue.

In an amendment promulgated on April 12, 2018, the Commission added a new specific offense characteristic at §2D1.1(b)(13) providing a 4-level enhancement that would apply if the defendant knowingly misrepresented or knowingly marketed as another

substance a mixture or substance containing fentanyl (N-phenyl-N-[1-(2-phenylethyl)-4-piperidinyl] propenamide) or a fentanyl analogue.¹² Additionally, the amendment added a new Note (J) to §2D1.1(c) captioned “Notes to Drug Quantity Table” defining the meaning of fentanyl analogue.

8. Section 2D1.1(b)(14)

2-, 3-, 6-level enhancements if manufacture of amphetamine or methamphetamine created a substantial risk of harm to a minor, human life, or the environment

Application Note 18(B) to §2D1.1 outlines factors to consider in determining whether an offense created a substantial risk of harm to human life or the environment. *See United States v. Loesel*, 728 F.3d 749, 752 (8th Cir. 2013) (that risk to human lives included risk to lives of co-conspirators and owner of remote farm was immaterial; even if they “assumed the risk,” as defendant asserted, they were still human lives placed at substantial risk of harm); *United States v. Chamness*, 435 F.3d 724, 728–29 (7th Cir. 2006) (methamphetamine laboratory in trailer posed substantial risk to human life or environment, warranting imposition of enhancement); *United States v. Florence*, 333 F.3d 1290, 1292–93 (11th Cir. 2003) (holding that defendant’s activities created substantial risk of harm to life of minors who were staying at hotel, and district court not required to identify specific minor at risk); *United States v. Owen*, 940 F.3d 308, 313 (6th Cir. 2019) (holding that defendant’s transportation of dangerous items used in the manufacture of methamphetamine in a vehicle presented a risk of harm to a minor riding in the vehicle).

9. Section 2D1.1(b)(15)

2-level enhancement for marijuana cultivation on state or federal land or while trespassing on tribal or private land

To apply, the defendant must also receive an adjustment under §3B1.1 (Aggravating Role). Application Note 19 to §2D1.1 outlines the purpose behind the enhancement.

10. Section 2D1.1(b)(16)

2-level super-aggravating role enhancement

Section 2D1.1(b)(16) provides for a 2-level enhancement if a defendant receives an adjustment under §3B1.1 (Aggravating Role) and the offense involved one or more of the super-aggravating factors listed at (b)(16)(A)–(E). Application Note 20 to §2D1.1, Application Note 2 to §3B1.4, and Application Note 7 to §3C1.1 provide guidance on the application of the enhancement at (b)(16). *See, e.g., United States v. Aguilar-Alonzo*, 944 F.3d 544, 552 (5th Cir. 2019) (“It cannot be that the mere existence of a romantic, familial, or any other kind of pre-existing relationship would support a two-level enhancement under §2D1.1(b)(15)(A)”).

¹² See USSG App. C, amend. 807 (effective Nov. 1, 2018).

11. Section 2D1.1(b)(17)

2-level minimal participant reduction

Section 2D1.1(b)(17) provides for a 2-level reduction if the defendant receives the 4-level reduction at §3B1.2(a) (“minimal participant”) and the offense involved all of the factors listed at (b)(17)(A)–(C).

12. Section 2D1.1(b)(18)

2-level safety valve reduction

Section 2D1.1(b)(18) provides for a 2-level reduction if a defendant meets the requirements for the “safety valve” reduction set forth at §5C1.2(a)(1)–(5), see discussion at Section IX, Part B. See, e.g., *United States v. Torres-Landrua*, 783 F.3d 58, 62 (1st Cir. 2015).

The 2-level reduction applies regardless of whether defendant was convicted of a crime carrying a mandatory minimum sentence and irrespective of the minimum offense level provision of §5C1.2(b). See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.21). A defendant may also qualify for the reduction under §2D1.1(b)(18) even if the defendant is convicted of violating a statute that is not listed at §5C1.2(a), and therefore is excluded from operation of the statutory safety-valve reduction.

D. CROSS REFERENCES

1. Murder

Section 2D1.1(d)(1) provides a cross reference to §2A1.1 (First Degree Murder) and §2A1.2 (Second Degree Murder) if the victim was killed under circumstances that would constitute murder under 18 U.S.C. § 1111.

18 U.S.C. § 1111 defines murder as “the unlawful killing of a human being with malice aforethought” and covers both first and second degree murder.

Distinguished from §2D1.1(a)(1)–(4). To receive the base offense levels under §2D1.1(a)(1)–(4), the offense of conviction, not just “circumstances” as in §2D1.1(d)(1), must establish that death or serious bodily injury occurred but no malice aforethought need be proved. See discussion at Section V, Part C.

2. Crime of Violence

Section 2D1.1(d)(2) provides for a cross reference to §2X1.1 (Attempt, Solicitation, or Conspiracy) if the defendant was *convicted* of violating 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(7)

(distribution of a controlled substance with intent to commit a crime of violence).¹³ The higher offense level, as determined under §2D1.1 or §2X1.1, applies. Crime of violence is defined in 18 U.S.C. § 16.¹⁴ Section 841(b)(7) specifically includes rape as a crime of violence.

For a defendant to be convicted under § 841(b)(7), the victim must have been unaware that a substance with the ability to impair his or her judgment was administered. Therefore, if the victim of the assault had knowingly taken the drug, the cross reference cannot be applied.¹⁵

Note. If, in the alternative, the defendant is convicted of distribution of a controlled substance resulting in serious bodily injury, §2D1.1(a)(1)–(4) applies. See discussion Section III, Part B.

E. APPLICATION ISSUES FOR SPECIFIC DRUGS

1. Cocaine

a. Powder cocaine v. cocaine base or “crack”

The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 (FSA) sets an 18:1 ratio between powder cocaine and cocaine base, or “crack.”¹⁶ In other words, it takes 18 times the quantity of powder

¹³ In *Johnson v. United States*, 135 S. Ct. 2551 (2015), the Court struck down the residual clause of the Armed Career Criminal Act as unconstitutionally vague. In *D’Antoni v. United States*, 916 F.3d 658 (7th Cir. 2019), the Seventh Circuit held that the petitioner’s prior federal conviction for conspiracy to kill a government witness did not qualify as a predicate offense under the pre-*Booker* career offender guideline. However, the Seventh Circuit noted a conflict with the Tenth Circuit’s opinion in *United States v. Miller*, 868 F.3d 1182 (10th Cir. 2017), where the Tenth Circuit upheld a career offender enhancement, holding that the residual clause was not unconstitutionally vague as applied to a defendant who had committed an offense specifically mentioned in the commentary.

¹⁴ In the wake of *Johnson*, the Court in *Sessions v. Dimaya*, 138 S. Ct. 1204 (2018), held the residual clause of the federal criminal code’s definition of “crime of violence” (18 U.S.C. § 16(b)), as incorporated into the Immigration and Nationality Act’s (INA) definition of “aggravated felony” (8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(43)(F)), was impermissibly vague.

¹⁵ This cross reference is limited to cases involving a conviction under 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(7). Amendment 667, which became effective on November 1, 2004, provided a special instruction in §2D1.1(e) that requires application of the vulnerable victim adjustment in §3A1.1(b)(1) if the defendant commits a sexual offense by distributing a controlled substance to another individual, with or without that individual’s knowledge.

¹⁶ The First Step Act of 2018, Pub. L. No. 115–391, § 404, 132 Stat. 5194 provides for the retroactive application of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010—which reduced the disparity between sentences for crack and powder cocaine. Although the Commission incorporated the Fair Sentencing Act into the guidelines and made that amendment retroactive, offenders sentenced before August 3, 2010 remained subject to the statutory penalty in effect at the time they were sentenced. As a result, several thousand offenders were ineligible for some or all of the sentence reduction that would have resulted from the retroactive application

cocaine to trigger the same statutory punishment as crack cocaine. See *United States v. Gomes*, 621 F.3d 1343, 1346 (11th Cir. 2010) (per curiam) (“The FSA . . . changes . . . the crack-to-powder ratio . . . to about 18:1. The FSA amends the sentencing provisions in 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1) by raising from 50 grams to 280 grams the amount of crack necessary to trigger the 10-year mandatory minimum sentence, and raising the amount from 5 to 28 grams necessary to trigger the 5-year minimum.”) (internal citations omitted). See also 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1)(A)(ii), (iii).

A court may consider the crack/powder cocaine disparity when imposing sentence. *Spears v. United States*, 555 U.S. 261, 264–66 (2009) (per curiam); *Kimbrough v. United States*, 552 U.S. 85, 111 (2007).

b. Definition of “cocaine base”

Section 2D1.1 defines cocaine base as “crack,” which is in turn defined as “the street name for a form of cocaine base, usually prepared by processing cocaine hydrochloride and sodium bicarbonate, and usually appearing in a lumpy, rocklike form.” See Note (D) to Drug Quantity Table.

In *DePierre v. United States*, 564 U.S. 70, 76–81 (2011), the Court considered whether the term “cocaine base” at 21 U.S.C. § 841 referred to any form of cocaine that is chemically classified as a base (*i.e.*, $C_{17}H_{21}NO_4$, the molecule found in crack cocaine, freebase, and coca paste) or is instead limited to only crack cocaine. The cocaine base at issue in *DePierre* did not contain a detectable amount of sodium bicarbonate, a component specified in the definition of “cocaine base” at Note (D) to the Drug Quantity Table. The Court held that the most natural reading of the term “cocaine base” means cocaine in its base form and reaches more broadly than only crack cocaine. The Court’s decision resolved the deep circuit split on this question.

2. Marijuana

a. Dry weight

As an exception to the general rule that drug weight includes the entire weight of any mixture or substance, see discussion Section III, Part B, the moisture in marijuana is not counted. The weight of marijuana is its weight when dry enough to consume. See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.1).

of the lowered sentencing guideline. The First Step Act now provides that offenders sentenced before enactment of the Fair Sentencing Act may be sentenced as if the provisions of the Fair Sentencing Act were in effect at the time the offender was sentenced. Motions for a reduced sentence under this part of the First Step Act may be made by the defendant, the Director of the BOP, the government, or the court. This provision does not provide for a retroactive reduction if the sentence was imposed or previously reduced in accordance with the Fair Sentencing Act, or a motion to reduce under the First Step Act has already been denied after a complete review on the merits.

b. Marijuana plants

A plant is defined as “an organism having leaves and a readily observable root formation.” See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.2). See also *United States v. Foree*, 43 F.3d 1572, 1581 (11th Cir. 1995) (cutting or seedling from marijuana plant is not considered a plant until it develops roots of its own). Neither the statute nor the Drug Quantity Table differentiates between male and female plants. See Note (E) to Drug Quantity Table (“regardless of sex”); see also *United States v. Proyect*, 989 F.2d 84, 88 (2d Cir. 1993) (upholding constitutionality of failure to differentiate).

Under §2D1.1, one marijuana plant is treated as equivalent to 100 grams of marijuana. See Note (E) to Drug Quantity Table. The Guidelines make an exception to this equivalency if the actual dry weight of harvested marijuana is greater, in which case the court should use the actual dry weight of the harvested marijuana. See *id.* Courts have generally applied the equivalency even if the actual weight of harvested marijuana plants is lower than 100 grams per plant. See *United States v. Olsen*, 537 F.3d 660, 665 n.2 (6th Cir. 2008) (collecting cases). The Sixth Circuit has limited this rule to manufacturing cases and has held that a sentence for possession or distribution should be based on the actual weight of the harvested plants. *Id.* at 663.

Note. One marijuana plant is treated as equivalent to 1 kilogram (not 100 grams) of marijuana for purpose of setting the statutory penalty range. See 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b)(1)(A)(vii), (B)(vii), (D).

3. Methamphetamine

a. Purity

The Drug Quantity Table treats methamphetamine (actual) separately from a mixture or substance containing a detectable amount of methamphetamine, and directs that whichever method results in the greater offense level applies. See Note (B) to Drug Quantity Table.

In addition, the Drug Quantity Table treats “Ice,” which is defined as a mixture or substance that is at least 80 percent pure d-methamphetamine, the same as methamphetamine (actual). See Note (C) to Drug Quantity Table.

b. Waste water (and other mixture substances)

As an exception to the general rule that drug weight includes the entire weight of any mixture or substance, see discussion Section III, Part B, for guideline purposes, methamphetamine weight does not include the weight of “wash” or waste water. See USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.1).

Note. The circuit courts are split on the question whether waste water weight (and the weights of other “waste” substances used in illegal drug manufacturing) counts when establishing a statutory minimum. *Compare United States v. Stewart*, 361 F.3d 373, 379–80 (7th Cir. 2004) (waste water weight does not trigger statutory minimums) (collecting cases), *with United States v. Treft*, 447 F.3d 421, 424–25 (5th Cir. 2006) (waste water weight does trigger statutory minimums).

c. Precursor chemicals

Certain precursor chemicals used to manufacture methamphetamine or amphetamine are included in the base offense level under §2D1.1 only if a defendant is sentenced under §2D1.1 (as opposed to being sentenced under §2D1.11 for a listed chemical offense), and the defendant’s relevant conduct included the manufacture or attempt to manufacture methamphetamine or amphetamine.

If the above condition is met, and the precursor is listed in the List I Chemical Equivalency Table, see §2D1.1, comment. (n.8), convert the precursor (List I Chemical) to the converted drug weight as discussed at Section III, Part B.

If the above condition is met, and the precursor is not listed in the List I Chemical Equivalency Table, the court may estimate the probable yield. Any such estimate, however, must be based on sufficiently reliable evidence as to probable yield based on the particular defendant’s capabilities viewed in light of the drug laboratory involved. *See, e.g., United States v. Rosacker*, 314 F.3d 422, 426 (9th Cir. 2002) (holding that district court erred in relying on forensic laboratory report that was based on unsupported assumptions); *United States v. Eschman*, 227 F.3d 886, 890–91 (7th Cir. 2000) (reversing district court’s use of 1:1 conversion from pseudoephedrine to methamphetamine based on theoretical 100 percent yield where expert testimony established lower practical yields), *superseded by statute as stated in United States v. Martin*, 438 F.3d 621 (6th Cir. 2006).

Note. If the defendant was convicted of a listed chemical offense, as opposed to a drug offense, apply §2D1.11 (Unlawfully Distributing, Importing, Exporting, or Possessing a Listed Chemical; Attempt or Conspiracy). *See* discussion at Section IV, Part D.

d. Grouping offenses from §§2D1.1 and 2D1.11

Cases involving convictions for precursor chemicals (sentenced under §2D1.11) and for methamphetamine (sentenced under §2D1.1) group under §3D1.2(b). *See* USSG §2D1.11, comment. (n.9). Determine the adjusted offense level for the count of conviction under §2D1.1 (which will include the precursor chemicals as relevant conduct if the defendant is accountable for using them to manufacture the methamphetamine) and the adjusted offense level for the count of conviction under §2D1.11 and apply the higher of the two. *See* USSG §3D1.3(a).

4. LSD

a. Carrier medium

As an exception to the general rule that drug weight includes the entire weight of any mixture or substance, see discussion at Section III, Part B, where LSD is on a carrier medium (*e.g.*, blotter paper), Note (G) to the Drug Quantity Table (§2D1.1(c)) establishes that each dose of LSD on the carrier medium is equal to 0.4 milligrams for the purposes of the Drug Quantity Table. *See* Note (G) to Drug Quantity Table.

Note. This rule does not apply for purpose of setting the statutory penalty range; the carrier medium is included in the weight for statutory purposes. *See Neal v. United States*, 516 U.S. 284, 294 (1996) (guidelines treatment does not override statute).

b. Liquid solution

If the LSD is contained in a liquid solution, the weight of the pure LSD alone should be used in determining the base offense level under the guidelines. *United States v. Morgan*, 292 F.3d 460, 463–64 (5th Cir. 2002); *United States v. Camacho*, 261 F.3d 1071, 1074 (11th Cir. 2001); *United States v. Ingram*, 67 F.3d 126, 128 (6th Cir. 1995); *United States v. Turner*, 59 F.3d 481, 485 (4th Cir. 1995). For purposes of applicability of mandatory statutory minimums, however, the sentencing court must consider total weight of liquid solution containing LSD. *Chapman v. United States*, 500 U.S. 453, 456 (1991) (for determining statutory minimum sentence, weight of carrier medium included in the weight of LSD); *Morgan*, 292 F.3d at 465.

IV. OTHER OFFENSE GUIDELINE SECTIONS

A. SECTION 2D1.2 (DRUG OFFENSES OCCURRING NEAR PROTECTED LOCATIONS OR INVOLVING UNDERAGE OR PREGNANT INDIVIDUALS; ATTEMPT OR CONSPIRACY)

Section 2D1.2 “applies only in a case in which the defendant is convicted of a statutory violation of drug trafficking in a protected location or involving an underage or pregnant individual (including an attempt or conspiracy to commit such a violation) or in a case in which the defendant stipulated to such a statutory violation.” *See* USSG §2D1.2, comment. (n.1).

Apply two plus the offense level from §2D1.1¹⁷ for the quantity of controlled substances directly involving a protected location or underage or pregnant individual; or, alternatively, one plus the offense level from §2D1.1 for the quantity of controlled substances

¹⁷ Application of the offense level from §2D1.1 refers to the entire offense guideline (*i.e.*, base offense level and applicable specific offense characteristics). *See* USSG §1B1.5, comment. (n.1).

involved in the offense. See USSG §2D1.2(a)(1) and (2). Otherwise, the base offense level would be 26, if the offense involved a person less than 18 years; or 13, in all other cases. See §2D1.2(a)(3) and (4). Apply the greatest of these alternatives.

B. SECTION 2D1.8 (RENTING OR MANAGING A DRUG ESTABLISHMENT; ATTEMPT OR CONSPIRACY)

Section 2D1.8 applies the offense levels set forth in §2D1.1, except that if “the defendant had no participation in the underlying controlled substance offense other than allowing use of the premises,” the offense level from §2D1.1 is reduced by four levels, and the offense level is no greater than 26. See USSG §2D1.8(a)(2). The defendant is ineligible for a role reduction under Chapter Three. See USSG §2D1.8(b)(1).

There is a circuit split as to who has the burden of proving participation in the underlying controlled substance offense. The Tenth Circuit held that the defendant had the burden of proving that he did not participate in the underlying trafficking offense, *United States v. Dickerson*, 195 F.3d 1183, 1189–90 (10th Cir. 1999), but other circuits have since held that the government must affirmatively prove that the defendant participated in the underlying drug trafficking in order to justify the higher sentence, see, e.g., *United States v. Leasure*, 319 F.3d 1092, 1098 (9th Cir. 2003); *In re Sealed Case*, 552 F.3d 841, 846 (D.C. Cir. 2009).

C. SECTION 2D1.10 (ENDANGERING HUMAN LIFE WHILE ILLEGALLY MANUFACTURING A CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE; ATTEMPT OR CONSPIRACY)

Where the defendant is convicted under 21 U.S.C. § 858 of endangering human life while illegally manufacturing a controlled substance, Appendix A specifies offense guideline §2D1.10.

1. Base Offense Level

Apply three plus the base offense level from the Drug Quantity Table in §2D1.1; or 20 otherwise. See USSG §2D1.10(a)(1) and (2).

2. Selected Specific Offense Characteristics under §2D1.10

Section 2D1.10(b)(1) provides a 3-level enhancement if the offense involved the manufacture of amphetamine or methamphetamine; and a 6-level enhancement if the offense also created a substantial risk of harm to the life of a minor or an incompetent. See discussion of a similar enhancement under §2D1.1(b)(13) at Section III, Part C.

D. SECTION 2D1.11 (UNLAWFULLY DISTRIBUTING, IMPORTING OR POSSESSING A LISTED CHEMICAL; ATTEMPT OR CONSPIRACY)

Where the defendant is convicted of a listed chemical offense (usually 21 U.S.C. § 841(c)(1) or (2)), Appendix A specifies guideline §2D1.11. To be convicted, the defendant must have knowingly committed the offense with reasonable cause to believe that a controlled substance would be manufactured. It is not required, however, that the defendant himself was involved in the manufacturing. *See* 21 U.S.C. § 841(c)(2) (“Any person who . . . possesses or distributes a listed chemical knowing, or having reasonable cause to believe, [it] . . . will be used to manufacture a controlled substance[.]”).

1. Base Offense Level

Apply the base offense level specified in the Chemical Quantity Table. *See* USSG §2D1.11(a), (d), (e).

Note regarding the 2014 Amendment to the Chemical Quantity Table. Effective November 1, 2014, in conjunction with its amendment to the Drug Quantity Table, the Commission amended the Chemical Quantity Table to generally reduce by two levels the offense levels assigned to most chemical quantities. *See* USSG App. C, amend. 782 (effective Nov. 1, 2014).

These reductions apply retroactively, with reduced sentences taking effect on November 1, 2015. *See* USSG App. C, amend. 788 (effective Nov. 1, 2014).

2. Selected Specific Offense Characteristics under §2D1.11

- a.** Section 2D1.11(b)(1) provides a 2-level enhancement if a dangerous weapon (including a firearm) was possessed. But unlike §2D1.1(b)(1), this provision allows a defendant to avoid the enhancement on a lesser evidentiary showing. *Compare* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.11) (“unless it is *clearly improbable* that the weapon was connected with the offense”) (emphasis added), *with* §2D1.11, comment. (n.2) (“unless it is *improbable* that the weapon was connected with the offense”) (emphasis added).
- b.** Section 2D1.11(b)(2) provides a 3-level reduction for certain convictions, unless the defendant “knew or believed” that the listed chemical was to be used to manufacture a controlled substance unlawfully. Convictions under 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(c)(2) and (f)(1), and 960(d)(2), (d)(3), and (d)(4) do not require that the defendant have knowledge or an actual belief that the listed chemical was to be used to manufacture a controlled substance unlawfully. This reduction therefore reflects that defendants who possess or distribute listed

chemicals without knowing or believing they would be used to manufacture a controlled substance unlawfully are less culpable. *See* USSG §2D1.11, comment. (n.3).

- c. Section 2D1.11(b)(4) provides a 2-level enhancement for distribution of a controlled substance, listed chemical, or prohibited equipment, through the use of an interactive computer service. *See* discussion of similar enhancement under §2D1.1(b)(7).
- d. Section 2D1.11(b)(6) provides for a 2-level reduction for defendants who meet the safety valve criteria at 18 U.S.C. § 3553(f)(1)–(5) and §5C1.2(a)(1)–(5). *See* USSG §2D1.11(b)(6).

3. Cross Reference

Section 2D1.11(c) provides a cross reference to §2D1.1, but only if the defendant (or a person for whose conduct the defendant is accountable under the relevant conduct rules) completed the actions sufficient to constitute the offense of manufacturing or attempting to manufacture a controlled substance unlawfully. *See* USSG §2D1.11(c).

As the scope of relevant conduct is not as broad as the scope of criminal conspiracy, *see* §1B1.3, comment. (n.2), note carefully whether the manufacture of a controlled substance is both in furtherance of jointly undertaken criminal activity and reasonably foreseeable in connection with that criminal activity.

For example, if a defendant was arrested selling pseudoephedrine to undercover agents, the cross reference would not apply because the defendant was not involved in the manufacture of a controlled substance or accountable for someone else manufacturing a controlled substance.

To constitute an attempt, the defendant (or a person for whose conduct the defendant is accountable as relevant conduct) must have intended to manufacture unlawfully and have taken a substantial step toward completing that objective. *See, e.g., United States v. Jessup*, 305 F.3d 300, 302–03 (5th Cir. 2002) (“[i]n order to show that the defendant attempted to manufacture methamphetamine, the government must show that the defendant (1) acted with the required criminal intent, and (2) engaged in conduct constituting a ‘substantial step’ toward commission of the substantive offense.”) (internal citations omitted).

E. SECTION 2D1.12 (UNLAWFUL POSSESSION, MANUFACTURE, DISTRIBUTION, TRANSPORTATION, EXPORTATION, OR IMPORTATION OF PROHIBITED FLASK, EQUIPMENT, CHEMICAL, PRODUCT, OR MATERIAL; ATTEMPT OR CONSPIRACY)

1. Base Offense Level

12 if the defendant either intended to manufacture a controlled substance or knew or believed that the prohibited flask, equipment, chemical product, or material was to be used to manufacture a controlled substance, or **9** otherwise. *See* USSG §2D1.12(a)(1) and (2).

2. Selected Specific Offense Characteristics

- a.** Section 2D1.12(b)(3) adds a 2-level enhancement for distribution of a controlled substance, listed chemical, or prohibited equipment, through the use of an interactive computer service. *See* USSG §2D1.12, comment. (n.4).
- b.** Section 2D1.12(b)(4) provides a 6-level enhancement if the offense involved stealing anhydrous ammonia or transporting stolen anhydrous ammonia.

F. SECTION 2D2.1 (UNLAWFUL POSSESSION; ATTEMPT OR CONSPIRACY)

Simple possession of a controlled substance in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 844 is sentenced under §2D2.1, which provides a flat base offense level that is set based on the type of controlled substance. Distribution of “a small amount of marijuana for no remuneration,” 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(4), is treated as simple possession and sentenced under §2D2.1. *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.26).

Section 2D2.1(b) provides a cross reference to §2P1.2, if the offense involved possession of a controlled substance in a prison, correctional facility, or detention facility.

V. SELECTED RELEVANT CONDUCT ISSUES SPECIFIC TO DRUG CASES

A. REASONABLE FORESEEABILITY AND RELEVANT CONDUCT

In the case of a jointly undertaken criminal activity, a defendant is accountable for “reasonably foreseeable quantities of contraband that were within the scope of the criminal activity that he jointly undertook.” USSG App. C, amend. 790 (effective Nov. 1, 2015). A “jointly undertaken criminal activity” is a “criminal plan, scheme, endeavor, or enterprise undertaken by the defendant in concert with others, whether or not charged as a conspiracy.” USSG §1B1.3, comment (n.3(A)). Proof of “reasonable foreseeability requires

more than just subjective awareness.” *United States v. Fox*, 548 F.3d 523, 532 (7th Cir. 2008).

In addition, a defendant is responsible for all acts and omissions that are part of “the same course of conduct or common scheme or plan as the offense of conviction.” USSG §1B1.3(a)(2); *see also United States v. Walker*, 688 F.3d 416, 421 (8th Cir. 2012) (“[i]n a drug conspiracy case, the district court may consider amounts from drug transactions in which the defendant was not directly involved if those dealings were part of the same course of conduct or scheme”) (internal citations omitted). For offenses to be considered part of a common scheme or plan under the relevant conduct rules, “they must be substantially connected to each other by at least one common factor, such as common victims, common accomplices, common purpose, or similar *modus operandi*.” *See* USSG §1B1.3, comment. (n.5(B)). Of course, “the relevant conduct must be unlawful.” *United States v. Chube*, 538 F.3d 693, 702–03 (7th Cir. 2008) (holding that relevant conduct did not include distribution of prescription medications that was “the result of mistake or inadvertence” and not “necessarily criminal”); *see also United States v. Bell*, 667 F.3d 431, 443 (4th Cir. 2011) (calculation of drug quantity must exclude prescription medications lawfully obtained and consumed by the defendant).

Separate incidents of possession with intent to distribute can be included within the scope of relevant conduct for the purpose of determining drug quantity when they qualify as part of a “common scheme or plan” or constitute the “same course of conduct” under §1B1.3. *See United States v. Hill*, 79 F.3d 1477, 1481–85 (6th Cir. 1996) (finding that discrete incident of possession separated in time by over one year from offense of conviction could not be part of common scheme or course of conduct). To find that separate events are related in this fashion, the *Guidelines Manual* requires courts to balance three factors: “the degree of similarity of the offenses, the regularity (repetitions) of the offenses, and the time interval between the offenses.” *Id.* at 1482 (*quoting* USSG §1B1.3, comment. (n.5(B))). *See also United States v. Gill*, 348 F.3d 147, 155 (6th Cir. 2003).

B. PRIOR CONVICTIONS AND RELEVANT CONDUCT

Section 4A1.2(a)(1) defines “prior sentence” for purposes of the criminal history computation and specifically excludes a “sentence for conduct that is part of the instant offense.” USSG §4A1.2, comment. (n.1). Application Note 1 explains conduct that is part of the instant offense means relevant conduct. Accordingly, if drug amounts attributable to a prior conviction are included as relevant conduct for a defendant’s offense level computation in a later case, that prior conviction should not also be counted in the criminal history calculations required by Chapter Four. *See, e.g., United States v. Weiland*, 284 F.3d 878, 881 (8th Cir. 2002). The district court’s determination about whether a prior conviction for drug trafficking was relevant conduct also may impact how the prior conviction would count for purposes of §5G1.3(b), (c). *See, e.g., United States v. Johnson*, 324 F.3d 875, 878–79 (7th Cir. 2003) (prior state cocaine conspiracy conviction was not relevant to defendant’s federal cocaine base distribution conviction, resulting in a portion

of his federal sentence running consecutive to his state sentence). *See also* USSG §1B1.3 comment. (n.5(C)).

C. BASE OFFENSE LEVELS IF DEATH RESULTS

Sections 2D1.1(a)(1)–(4) provide base offense levels for offenses that involve death or serious bodily injury from the use of a controlled substance. Each of these four provisions contains a requirement that, among other things, “the offense of conviction establishes that death or serious bodily injury resulted from the use of the substance[.]” *See* USSG §2D1.1(a)(1)–(4). The Sentencing Commission’s view is that this “offense of conviction” language, which tracks the statutory language verbatim, *see* 21 U.S.C. §§ 841(b)(1)(A), (b)(1)(E), 960(b)(1), (3), and (5), limits the application of these offense levels to cases where death or serious bodily injury is proved beyond a reasonable doubt by plea or to the factfinder. *See* USSG App. C, amend. 123 (effective Nov. 1, 1989) (“The purpose of this amendment [limiting the application of §2D1.1(a)(1), (a)(2)] is to provide that subsections (a)(1) and (a)(2) apply only in the case of a conviction under the circumstances specified in the statutes cited.”). *See also* Amendment 727 adding §2D1.1(a)(3)–(4.)

Before *Alleyne*, there was a circuit split over whether the “offense of conviction” language limits the application of these enhancements to such cases or whether they may be applied after mere judicial fact finding. After *Alleyne*, the Seventh Circuit, in *United States v. Lawler*, 818 F.3d 281 (7th Cir. 2016) agreed with *United States v. Rebmann*, 321 F.3d 540, 543–44 (6th Cir. 2003) (enhanced base offense level not triggered by judicial fact finding at sentencing) ; *United States v. Pressler*, 256 F.3d 144, 157 n.7 (3d Cir. 2001) (same, in *dicta*), and *United States v. Greenough*, 669 F.3d 567 (5th Cir. 2012). The following circuit courts reached their opposite decisions based on an *Apprendi* analysis: *United States v. Rodriguez*, 279 F.3d 947, 950 (11th Cir. 2002) (enhanced offense level applied after court made findings by a preponderance and sentence did not exceed statutory maximum for lesser offense); *United States v. Cathey*, 259 F.3d 365, 368 & n.12 (5th Cir. 2001) (same); *United States v. McIntosh*, 236 F.3d 968, 975–76 (8th Cir. 2001) (same), *abrogated by Burrage v. United States*, 134 S. Ct. 881 (2014) (defendant cannot be liable under the penalty enhancement provision of § 841(b)(1)(C) unless use of a drug is the but-for cause of the death or injury).

A similar circuit split exists in cases where a defendant is charged with conspiring to commit the underlying substantive counts. *Compare United States v. Wexler*, 522 F.3d 194, 207 (2d Cir. 2008) (approving of instruction requiring jury to make separate finding by proof beyond a reasonable doubt whether death or serious bodily injury resulted from the conspiracy offense), *with United States v. Westry*, 524 F.3d 1198, 1217–21 (11th Cir. 2008) (per curiam) (applying enhanced offense levels under a §1B1.3 “relevant conduct” analysis and rejecting requirement for jury finding of “death” or “serious bodily injury” by proof beyond a reasonable doubt.)

D. PERSONAL USE QUANTITIES AND RELEVANT CONDUCT

Because simple possession of a controlled substance is an offense that is sentenced under a Chapter Two guideline that is excluded from grouping at §3D1.2(d), the guidelines instruct that the act of simple possession and the corresponding drug amounts should not be included as part of the same course of conduct or common scheme or plan (*see* USSG §1B1.3(a)(2)) in the calculation of the base offense level for drug trafficking offenses. Whether such acts and amounts can be otherwise included in the calculation of a conspiracy or substantive count for drug trafficking has, however, been the subject of various court opinions.

Whether a defendant should be held accountable under the relevant conduct rules for drugs possessed for personal use varies depending upon the offense charged. Personal use amounts are not included in drug amounts used to compute the base offense level when the charge is possession with intent to distribute. *See United States v. Gill*, 348 F.3d 147, 151–53 (6th Cir. 2003) (because defendant’s possession of drugs for personal use was not act that occurred during commission of offense of conviction, in preparation for that offense, or in course of attempting to avoid detection or responsibility for that offense, it could not be considered relevant conduct); *United States v. Olson*, 408 F.3d 366, 374 (7th Cir. 2005) (“On the one hand, [defendant] possessed a small amount of marijuana . . . suggesting that [he] held the drugs for his own personal use. If so, then the underlying conduct would be considered mere possession of a controlled substance, and would therefore not constitute relevant conduct to the instant offense of possession with intent to distribute. On the other hand, the subdivision of those two ounces of marijuana in six smaller baggies might suggest that [he] did intend to distribute the drugs, in which case the prior conviction would have been for relevant conduct.”).

If the case includes a conspiracy count, personal use amounts may or may not be included in the base offense level computation. *Compare United States v. Ault*, 598 F.3d 1039, 1041 (8th Cir. 2010) (“[s]imple possession of an amount of methamphetamine consistent with personal use is not in itself preparation or furtherance of a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine”) (internal quotations omitted), *with United States v. Asch*, 207 F.3d 1238, 1240 (10th Cir. 2000) (where member of conspiracy to distribute drugs handles drugs both for personal consumption and distribution in course of conspiracy, entire quantity of drugs handled is relevant conduct for purposes of calculating base offense level pursuant to guidelines). *See also United States v. Fregoso*, 60 F.3d 1314, 1328–29 (8th Cir. 1995); *United States v. Snook*, 60 F.3d 394, 395–96 (7th Cir. 1995); *United States v. Innamorati*, 996 F.2d 456, 492 (1st Cir. 1993); *cf. United States v. Antonietti*, 86 F.3d 206, 209–10 (11th Cir. 1996) (holding that drugs possessed for personal use were relevant to offenses of manufacturing, possessing with intent to distribute, and conspiring to manufacture and possess with intent to distribute, without recognizing distinctions among offenses).

VI. SENTENCING MANIPULATION / ENTRAPMENT

Entrapment, a complete defense to a crime, occurs when the government induces a defendant who was not predisposed to engage in criminal conduct to commit a crime. Many courts recognize that the analogous “sentencing entrapment”—when the defendant can show he was predisposed to commit a minor or lesser offense, but was entrapped to commit a greater offense—would require sentencing the defendant for the crime he was predisposed to commit rather than the crime he did commit. Few courts have found, however, that defendants have proved sentencing entrapment.

Courts have also considered claims of sentencing manipulation. While often used interchangeably, the Ninth Circuit clarified that, distinct from sentencing entrapment, sentencing manipulation occurs when the government increases a defendant’s guideline sentence by conducting a lengthy investigation that increases the number of drug transactions and quantities for which the defendant is responsible. *See United States v. Boykin*, 785 F.3d 1352, 1360–61 (9th Cir. 2015).

A. GUIDELINES REMEDIES FOR SENTENCING MANIPULATION / ENTRAPMENT

Application Notes 5 and 27(A) to §2D1.1 provide for specific remedies for sentencing manipulation by the government, either by excluding amounts from the base offense level or by departure.

1. Application Note 5 to §2D1.1

Note 5 provides in pertinent part that, where an offense involves an agreement to sell a controlled substance, the base offense level is based on the agreed-upon quantity, *unless* the defendant establishes that he did not intend to provide, or was not reasonably capable of providing, the agreed-upon quantity. This note was amended in November 2004 to clarify that it includes not only a seller but also a defendant-buyer in a reverse sting operation. *See, e.g., United States v. Love*, 706 F.3d 832 (7th Cir. 2013) (court erred by including in amount of drugs agreed-upon amount of crack cocaine in reverse sting operation, when it was undisputed defendant never actually intended to sell drugs that day).

2. Application Note 27(A) to §2D1.1

Note 27(A) states that the court may depart downward if it finds that the government agent in a reverse sting sets a price for the controlled substance that is substantially below the market value, thereby leading the defendant to purchase a significantly greater quantity than he would otherwise have been able to purchase.

Note 27(A) has been interpreted in different ways by the courts. The courts may look at the government’s intention to increase a sentence or the defendant’s predisposition

to buy drugs. Many factors are taken into consideration in determining whether a defendant participated in a drug buy or is capable of purchasing certain drug quantities. In addition to the price offered by the government in a reverse sting, other factors, such as credit terms, initial down payment and repayment plans, have also been examined.

In the District of Columbia Circuit, the court applied a two-part test to make this determination: (1) whether the government offered overgenerous terms or inducements and; (2) whether the overgenerous terms led the defendant to purchase a greater quantity of drugs than his resources otherwise would have allowed. *See e.g., United States v. Gaviria*, 116 F.3d 1498, 1527 (D.C. Cir. 1997) (per curiam) (denying downward departure where defendant presented no evidence that agreed upon price was substantially below market price). The Eighth Circuit added a third consideration: whether the defendant is predisposed to buying drugs. *See United States v. Searcy*, 233 F.3d 1096, 1099–1102 (8th Cir. 2000) (court remanded for reconsideration in light of fact defendant never dealt in crack cocaine before government agent coaxed him to do so.). The Ninth Circuit used a different test by looking to the government’s intent: whether the government lowered the price with the intention that an increase in the defendant’s sentence would be the result. *See United States v. Naranjo*, 52 F.3d 245, 251 (9th Cir. 1995) (finding strong evidence DEA agents were trying to increase quantity of drugs purchased by offering to buy back unsold quantities).

Application of Note 27(A) is primarily factor-driven. *See United States v. Lora*, 129 F. Supp. 2d 77, 91 (D. Mass. 2001) (where drug quantity was used to measure defendant’s culpability, quantity at issue must be product of defendant’s proclivity and not government’s effort to ratchet up sentence); *United States v. Goodwin*, 317 F.3d 293, 297–98 (D.C. Cir. 2003) (denying defendant’s motion for downward departure where it found quantity discounts and minimal down payments for drugs were common occurrence in illicit drug trade); *United States v. Panduro*, 38 F. App’x 36, 37–38 (2d Cir. 2002) (holding Note 27(A) is applicable where government agents offered drugs on nearly 50 percent consignment basis). The transaction need not be monetary based. *See United States v. Cambrelen*, 29 F. Supp. 2d 120, 126 (E.D.N.Y. 1998) (granting sentence reduction where court found government agent’s influence led defendant to steal drugs from warehouse).

B. OTHER SENTENCING MANIPULATION/ENTRAPMENT

Courts have also recognized other forms of sentencing manipulation and/or entrapment by the government. *See, e.g., United States v. Bigley*, 786 F.3d 11, 14 (D.C. Cir. 2015) (per curiam) (remanding for consideration of defense argument that government introduced camera into discussion of sexual conduct with minor in order to manipulate and increase defendant’s sentence). For example, the Ninth Circuit has held that drugs should be excluded from consideration where the defendant was pressured (or entrapped) to sell more or more serious drugs. *See United States v. Stauffer*, 38 F.3d 1103, 1108 (9th Cir. 1994); *see also United States v. Searcy*, 233 F.3d 1096, 1100 (8th Cir. 2000). Some courts have also held that excluding amounts of drugs based on sentencing manipulation or

entrapment may reduce the sentence below the mandatory minimum. *See, e.g., United States v. Riewe*, 165 F.3d 727, 729 (9th Cir. 1999) (per curiam); *United States v. Montoya*, 62 F.3d 1, 3 (1st Cir. 1995).

C. LIMITS ON SENTENCING MANIPULATION/ENTRAPMENT

Some courts have limited consideration of sentencing entrapment for the purposes of a reduction to those cases where the government has engaged in outrageous conduct. *See, e.g., United States v. Scull*, 321 F.3d 1270, 1277 (10th Cir. 2003). The Sixth and Eleventh Circuits have rejected “sentencing entrapment” as a ground for departure. *See United States v. Hammadi*, 737 F.3d 1043, 1048 (6th Cir. 2013); *United States v. Ciszkowski*, 492 F.3d 1264, 1270 (11th Cir. 2007) (but recognizing outrageous government conduct defense and sentencing manipulation).

VII. CHAPTER THREE: ADJUSTMENTS

A. ROLE ADJUSTMENTS

Sections 2D1.1 and 2D1.11 give offense level decreases to defendants who receive a mitigating role adjustment under §3B1.2 (Mitigating Role); the decreases in the Chapter Two guidelines are in addition to the adjustments from Chapter Three. First, defendants who receive a mitigating role adjustment under §3B1.2 also receive a graduated reduction in the applicable base offense level where the quantity level under §§2D1.1 and 2D1.11 results in a base offense level of 32 or greater. *See* discussion of §2D1.1(a)(5) at Section III, Part B, and discussion of §2D1.11 at Section IV, Part D. Furthermore, defendants who receive a §3B1.2(a) “minimal participant” role reduction may also receive an additional 2-level reduction pursuant to §2D1.1(b)(16).

B. ABUSE OF POSITION OF TRUST OR USE OF A SPECIAL SKILL

Application Note 23 of §2D1.1 provides that an adjustment under §3B1.3 (Abuse of Position of Trust or Use of Special Skill) ordinarily would apply in cases where the defendant used a position of trust or special skills in the commission of an offense. For example, an adjustment under §3B1.3 would ordinarily apply in the case of a defendant who used his or her position as a coach to influence an athlete to use an anabolic steroid. Likewise, an adjustment under §3B1.3 ordinarily would apply in a case in which the defendant is convicted of a drug offense resulting from the authorization of the defendant to receive scheduled substances from an ultimate user or long-term care facility. *See* 21 U.S.C. § 822(g).

Courts have applied the adjustment for use of a special skill in drug trafficking cases. *See, e.g., United States v. Calderon*, 127 F.3d 1314, 1339–40 (11th Cir. 1997) (upholding adjustment for defendants who captained vessel on high seas during drug smuggling

operation); *United States v. Nelson-Rodriguez*, 319 F.3d 12, 57–58 (1st Cir. 2003) (defendant’s skills with communication equipment and ability to determine and locate frequencies necessary to communicate with Colombians significantly facilitated commission of offense and was thus special skill); *United States v. Chastain*, 198 F.3d 1338, 1353 (11th Cir. 1999) (defendant who acted as pilot for conspiracy to import marijuana into United States was properly subject to adjustment for use of special skill); *United States v. Campbell*, 61 F.3d 976, 982 n. 7 (1st Cir. 1995) (upholding application of adjustment for defendant who had “near PhD training as a chemist,” who was charged with manufacturing P2P, a precursor chemical for methamphetamine). *Cf. United States v. Montero-Montero*, 370 F.3d 121, 123–24 (1st Cir. 2004) (reversing application of adjustment where evidence failed to show defendant navigated boat used for smuggling operation); *United States v. Lord*, 915 F.3d 1009, 1018 (5th Cir. 2019) (reversing application of the adjustment because defendant lacked the education, skills, training, licensing, or experience to support a §3B1.3 adjustment for use of special skills, even though he was described as a “very intelligent computer skills set-type person” and had a working knowledge of the “darknet marketplace”); *United States v. Burt*, 134 F.3d 997, 999 (10th Cir. 1998) (adjustment should not have been applied to suspended deputy sheriff involved in drug dealing based on knowledge of tricks used to conceal drugs because such skills do not qualify as special skills).

C. USING A MINOR TO COMMIT A CRIME

1. Section 3B1.4 “Using” a Minor

This upward adjustment does not apply in cases where the Chapter Two offense guideline incorporates this factor. *See* USSG §3B1.4, comment. (n.2). For example, if a defendant receives a §2D1.1(b)(16)(B) enhancement for involving a person less than 18 years of age in the offense, §3B1.4 does not apply. *See id.*

Another issue is whether a 2-level upward adjustment for using a minor to commit an offense requires evidence that the defendant acted affirmatively to involve the minor in the crime, beyond merely acting as his partner. Five circuits have held that, to justify this adjustment, it is not enough if the defendant and the minor are equal participants in a crime. *United States v. Acosta*, 474 F.3d 999, 1002 (7th Cir. 2007); *United States v. Sutor*, 253 F.3d 1206, 1210 (10th Cir. 2001); *United States v. Pojilenko*, 416 F.3d 243, 247 (3d Cir. 2007) (“[w]e agree with our sister Circuits that some affirmative act is necessary beyond mere partnership in order to implicate § 3B1.4”); *United States v. Butler*, 207 F.3d 839, 847 (6th Cir. 2000) (no §3B1.4 adjustment because defendant and minor possessed equal authority in their commission of crime and “use” of minor requires more affirmative action on part of defendant); *United States v. Parker*, 241 F.3d 1114, 1120–21 (9th Cir. 2001) (no §3B1.4 adjustment because Note 1 defines “used” as “directly commanding, encouraging, intimidating, counseling, training, procuring, recruiting or soliciting” and defendant merely “participated” in armed bank robbery with minor). Other circuits take the position that an adjustment under §3B1.4 is warranted where, although the defendant did not personally

engage a minor, he could “reasonably foresee” a co-conspirator’s use of a minor. *See, e.g., United States v. Lewis*, 386 F.3d 475, 479–80 (2d Cir. 2004).

Courts have applied the adjustment in instances where the minor was not actively involved in the crime. *See, e.g., United States v. Andres*, 703 F.3d 828, 835 (5th Cir. 2013) (adjustment applied even assuming young girl already inside truck when defendant got into truck containing 20 kilograms of cocaine and drove it from Laredo to Chicago); *United States v. Gaskin*, 364 F.3d 438, 464–65 (2d Cir. 2004) (adjustment was warranted where defendant drove son to parking lot and took delivery of an RV containing marijuana so that son could drive defendant’s car); *United States v. Castro-Hernandez*, 258 F.3d 1057, 1059–60 (9th Cir. 2001) (adjustment was warranted where defendant was transporting 3-year-old son as passenger in truck at same time he was smuggling drugs); *United States v. Warner*, 204 F.3d 799, 801 n.2 (8th Cir. 2000) (upholding adjustment where defendant offered to leave 8-year-old daughter with drug purchasers as collateral for payment money they entrusted to him).

2. Section 3B1.4 Use of Minor and Defendant’s Age

A circuit split exists about whether a 2-level upward adjustment for using a minor to commit an offense applies to defendants of all ages. *Compare United States v. Butler*, 207 F.3d 839, 850–51 (6th Cir. 2000) (Jones, J., concurring) (finding that §3B1.4 violated Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which directed the Commission to “promulgate guidelines or amend existing guidelines to provide that defendant 21 years of age or older who has been convicted of offense shall receive appropriate sentence enhancement if the defendant involved a minor in the commission of the offense”), *with United States v. Murphy*, 254 F.3d 511, 513 (4th Cir. 2001) (Commission complied with congressional directive because every defendant over the age of 21 will receive §3B1.4 adjustment), *United States v. Ramsey*, 237 F.3d 853, 858 & n.7 (7th Cir. 2001) (Congress implicitly approved of §3B1.4 by failing to disapprove it in 1995 during the waiting period before amendment went into effect even though Congress disapproved crack cocaine and money laundering amendments also proposed that same year).

VIII. CHAPTER FOUR: CRIMINAL HISTORY, CAREER OFFENDER, AND ARMED CAREER CRIMINAL (ACCA)

Application of the career offender guideline at §4B1.1 or the Armed Career Criminal Act (ACCA) guideline at §4B1.4 requires, *inter alia*, that (1) the defendant’s instant conviction be either a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense (career offender cases), or a violent felony or a serious drug offense (ACCA cases); and (2) the defendant’s record include the requisite number of predicate offenses (two previous such offenses for career offender status and three such offenses for ACCA status). Section 4B1.4 notes that the definitions of “crime of violence” and “violent felony” as well as “controlled substance offense” and “serious drug offense” are *not* identical. *See* USSG §4B1.4, comment. (n.1).

“Crime of violence” and “controlled substance offense” are defined by the guidelines. “Violent felony” and “serious drug offense” are defined in 18 U.S.C. § 924(e)(2)(A) & (B)¹⁸ and incorporated by the guidelines in §4B1.4.

Although circuit courts may treat “crime of violence” and “violent felony” interchangeably where portions of the career offender and ACCA provisions are materially similar, they also recognize that the differing definitions for these terms may lead to a prior conviction qualifying for one enhancement but not the other. *Compare United States v. Harrison*, 558 F.3d 1280, 1291–92 (11th Cir. 2009) (career offender’s residual clause language materially identical to ACCA’s residual clause), *abrogated on other grounds by Sykes v. United States*, 564 U.S. 1 (2011), with *United States v. Ross*, 613 F.3d 805, 809–10 (8th Cir. 2010) (career offender and ACCA provisions are the same in some respects but their express differences may lead to different results in a given case).

While the career offender and ACCA provisions are not identical, courts apply the same “categorical” and “modified categorical” legal analyses when determining whether a predicate offense qualifies for the career offender (§4B1.1) or ACCA (§ 924(e) and §4B1.4) sentencing enhancement. *See Taylor v. United States*, 495 U.S. 575, 600 (1990), *Johnson v. United States*, 559 U.S. 133, 144 (2010), *Shepard v. United States*, 544 U.S. 13, 19–20 (2005), and *Descamps v. United States*, 133 S. Ct. 2276, 2283–86 (2013) (explaining the “categorical” and “modified categorical approach” analyses and what evidence may be considered in those analyses). *See also Mathis v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 2243 (2016), as to the application of the categorical approach analysis when a state statute sets forth alternative *means* of committing the crime, as opposed to setting forth alternative *elements*.

The Supreme Court has spoken infrequently about “controlled substance offenses” and “serious drug offenses” for purposes of the career offender or ACCA enhancement. *See, e.g., McNeill v. United States*, 563 U.S. 816 (2011) (when determining whether “an offense under State law” is a “serious drug offense” for purposes of ACCA, sentencing court should consult maximum term of imprisonment applicable to defendant’s offense at time of state conviction); *United States v. Rodriguez*, 553 U.S. 377, 381–82 (2008) (ACCA’s “serious drug offense” definition—“an offense under State law, involving manufacturing, distributing, or possessing with intent to distribute, a controlled substance . . . for which a maximum term of imprisonment of ten years or more is prescribed by law”—includes reference to state recidivist provisions). But the circuit courts have unremarkably observed that sentencing

¹⁸ The Commission promulgated an amendment changing the definition of “crime of violence” at §4B1.2 after the Supreme Court’s decision in *Johnson v. United States*, 135 S. Ct. 2551 (2015), striking down the “residual clause” of the ACCA as unconstitutionally vague. *See* USSG App. C, amend. 798 (effective Aug. 1, 2016). The amendment is also a result of the Commission’s multi-year study of statutory and guideline definitions relating to the nature of a defendant’s prior convictions (*e.g.*, “crime of violence,” “aggravated felony,” “violent felony,” “drug trafficking offense,” and “felony drug offense”). After Amendment 798, the Supreme Court in *Beckles v. United States*, 137 S. Ct. 886 (2017), held that the guidelines were not subject to a vagueness challenge because the guidelines do not fix the sentencing range, but only guide the court when it exercises its discretion in choosing an appropriate sentence within a statutory range.

courts must apply the categorical analyses when determining whether a state drug offense qualifies as a career offender or ACCA predicate offense. *See, e.g., United States v. Robinson*, 583 F.3d 1292, 1295 (11th Cir. 2009) (per curiam) (determinations about whether particular conviction qualifies as serious drug offense under ACCA proceeds under “a formal categorical approach”).

IX. CHAPTER FIVE: DETERMINING THE SENTENCE

A. STATUTORY PENALTY RANGES REVISITED: *APPRENDI*

1. *Statutory Maximum Sentence*

a. *Apprendi v. New Jersey, 530 U.S. 466 (2000)*

In *Apprendi*, the United States Supreme Court held that “[o]ther than the fact of a prior conviction, any fact that increases the penalty for a crime beyond the prescribed statutory maximum must be submitted to a jury, and proved beyond a reasonable doubt.” *Apprendi*, 530 U.S. at 490. Before *Apprendi*, the usual practice had been for the district court to treat drug quantity and other penalty-enhancing facts as sentencing factors that it determined at sentencing by a preponderance of the evidence. After *Apprendi*, the circuit courts have uniformly held that *Apprendi*’s rule applies to facts, such as drug type, drug quantity, death or serious bodily injury, that increase the otherwise applicable statutory maximum sentence.

For example, if a defendant is convicted of possession with intent to sell an unspecified amount of cocaine, the statutory maximum sentence is 20 years, pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 841(b)(1)(C), even if the government proves at sentencing that the amount of cocaine involved would trigger an enhanced penalty.

b. **Statutory maximum trumps guideline range**

Under §5G1.1(a) and (c)(1), the statutory maximum sentence trumps the otherwise applicable guideline range. Therefore, after *Apprendi*, the absolute maximum sentence is determined by what triggering facts were pled and proved to the guilt-phase factfinder, by competent evidence, beyond a reasonable doubt.

For example, if a defendant is convicted of possession with intent to sell an unspecified amount of cocaine (20-year statutory maximum), and the otherwise applicable guideline range is 292–365 months, the guideline sentence is 240 months (20 years).

c. Stacking of multiple convictions

When a defendant sustains multiple convictions, §5G1.2(d) advises courts to run sentences consecutively to the extent necessary to achieve the guideline range. As noted by the Tenth Circuit, “in multiple-count cases to which *Booker* applies, § 5G1.2(d) ‘is no longer mandatory, but a sentence consistent with it carries a badge of reasonableness we are bound to consider.’” *United States v. Hollis*, 552 F.3d 1191, 1195 (10th. Cir. 2009) (citing *United States v. Eversole*, 487 F.3d 1024, 1033 (6th Cir. 2007)).

2. Statutory Mandatory Minimum Sentences¹⁹

a. *Alleyne v. United States*, 570 U.S. 99 (2013)

In *Alleyne*, the Supreme Court held that any fact that increases the mandatory minimum is an “element” that must be submitted to the jury. In so holding, the Court overruled its prior decision in *Harris v. United States*, 536 U.S. 545 (2002) (holding that *Apprendi* did not preclude judicial fact finding that increased a mandatory minimum sentence), explaining that “there is no basis in principle or logic to distinguish facts that raise the maximum from those that increase the minimum[.]” The Supreme Court in *Alleyne* further held that because the judge’s finding by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant brandished a firearm increased the penalty to which the defendant was subjected, it was an element to be found by a jury beyond a reasonable doubt.

Applying *Alleyne*, courts have held that a jury must determine the type and quantity of controlled substances involved in the offense if the drug type and/or quantity increases the statutorily prescribed minimum sentence. See *United States v. Delgado-Marrero*, 744 F.3d 167, 185 (1st Cir. 2014); *United States v. Harakaly*, 734 F.3d 88, 95 (1st Cir. 2013); *United States v. Claybrooks*, 729 F.3d 699, 708 (7th Cir. 2013). However, factual findings made for the purposes of applying the sentencing guidelines that do not increase the applicable mandatory minimum sentence do not violate the rule in *Alleyne*. See *United States v. Ramirez-Negron*, 751 F.3d 42, 49 (1st Cir. 2014); *United States v. Hernandez*, 731 F.3d 666, 672 (7th Cir. 2013); *United States v. Johnson*, 732 F.3d 577, 583–84 (6th Cir. 2013).

¹⁹ A detailed discussion of statutory mandatory minimum sentencing is presented in the U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, REPORT TO CONGRESS: MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTIES IN THE FEDERAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM (2011), <https://www.ussc.gov/research/congressional-reports/2011-report-congress-mandatory-minimum-penalties-federal-criminal-justice-system>. Additionally, in October 2017, the Commission published a report on mandatory minimum penalties for drug offenses, providing sentencing data on offenses carrying drug mandatory minimums, the impact on the Federal Bureau of Prisons population, and differences observed when analyzing each of five main drug types. See U.S. SENTENCING COMM’N, MANDATORY MINIMUM PENALTIES FOR DRUG OFFENSES IN THE FEDERAL SYSTEM (2017), https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2017/20171025_Drug-Mand-Min.pdf.

b. Statutory minimum trumps guideline range

Under §5G1.1(b) and (c)(2), the statutory minimum sentence trumps the otherwise applicable guideline range. *See, e.g., United States v. Padilla*, 618 F.3d 643, 644 (7th Cir. 2010) (per curiam) (under §5G1.1(b), advisory range of 155–188 months yielded to statutory minimum to establish 240-month guideline sentence); *United States v. Brehm*, 442 F.3d 1291, 1296 (11th Cir. 2006) (under §5G1.1(c), advisory range of 108–135 months yielded to 120-month statutory minimum to establish 120 to 135-month range).

c. Drug quantity under guidelines does not necessarily equal drug quantity under the statute

In some cases, the drug quantity used for calculating the guidelines will not be the same as the drug quantity used to calculate the statutory minimum. One court has stated: “[S]tatutory minimums do not hinge on the particular defendant’s relevant conduct. In a drug conspiracy, the amount of drugs attributable to any one codefendant as ‘relevant conduct’ for guidelines purposes is limited to the reasonably foreseeable transactions in furtherance of that codefendant’s ‘jointly undertaken criminal activity,’ USSG §1B1.3(a)(1)(B), but when it comes to the statutory penalties, every coconspirator is liable for the sometimes broader set of transactions that were reasonably foreseeable acts in furtherance of the entire conspiracy.” *United States v. Easter*, 553 F.3d 519, 523 (7th Cir. 2009) (per curiam) (citing cases). Said another way, conspiratorial liability is broader than the scope of relevant conduct.

B. RELIEF FROM MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES: THE “SAFETY VALVE”

For violations of 21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 844, 846, 960, and 963, the “safety valve” provision at 18 U.S.C. § 3553(f) directs courts to impose sentences “without regard to any statutory minimum sentence” if the five conditions listed at § 3553(f)(1)–(5) are met. This means that if the five statutory conditions are met, there is no mandatory minimum term.

The five statutory conditions are listed nearly verbatim at §5C1.2(a)(1)–(5). The defendant bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of evidence that all five conditions are met. *See, e.g., United States v. Zakharov*, 468 F.3d 1171, 1181 (9th Cir. 2006) (“[t]he defendant holds the burden of demonstrating by a preponderance of the evidence that he qualifies for . . . safety valve treatment”); *United States v. Johnson*, 375 F.3d 1300, 1302 (11th Cir. 2004) (“[t]he burden is on the defendant to show that he has met all of the safety valve factors”). Once the court finds that the conditions are met, the court has no discretion but to apply the guidelines without regard to the mandatory minimum. *See, e.g., United States v. Myers*, 106 F.3d 936, 941 (10th Cir. 1997); *United States v. Real-Hernandez*, 90 F.3d 356, 361–62 (9th Cir. 1996).

1. **The Statutory and Guideline Conditions**

a. **No more than four criminal history points**

The First Step Act of 2018, in section 402 (Broadening of Existing Safety Valve), extended safety valve eligibility from offenders who had one criminal history point²⁰ to offenders who have up to four criminal history points. Additionally, the Act, “exclude[s] counting] any criminal history points resulting from a 1-point offense, as determined under [§4A1.1(c)].” Because §4A1.1(c) counts one-point offenses “up to a total of 4 points for this subsection,” a defendant can have up to four points under §4A1.1(c), none of which are considered towards the four-point expanded safety valve maximum, *in addition* to the four points under other provisions that are counted towards the four-point maximum.²¹ However, offenders who have a “prior 3-point offense” or a “prior 2-point violent offense” are excluded from eligibility, regardless of their criminal history score. The Act defines “violent offense” as a “crime of violence,” as defined by 18 U.S.C. § 16, that is punishable by imprisonment.²²

b. **No violence or weapon**

This criterion is met if *the defendant* did not possess a firearm in connection with the offense.

²⁰ Prior to the First Step Act, this criterion was met only if the defendant, by a straight application of §4A1.1, has no more than one criminal history point. That is, even if a court departed, pursuant to §4A1.3, down to one criminal history point, the defendant did not meet this criterion. *See e.g., United States v. Hernandez-Castro*, 473 F.3d 1004, 1005–06 (9th Cir. 2007) (post-*Booker*, “courts have no authority to adjust criminal history points for the purpose of granting safety valve relief”); *accord United States v. McKoy*, 452 F.3d 234, 239 (3d Cir. 2006); *United States v. Brehm*, 442 F.3d 1291, 1300 (11th Cir. 2006) (per curiam); *United States v. Barrero*, 425 F.3d 154, 157–58 (2d Cir. 2005); *United States v. Bermudez*, 407 F.3d 536, 544–45 (1st Cir. 2005).

In addition, the First Step Act extended applicability of the safety valve to maritime cases to the same extent as others (adding offenses under 46 U.S.C. §§ 70503 and 70506). Sections 70503 and 70506 are the prohibited acts and penalties sections, respectively, of Chapter 705 of title 46 (Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act).

²¹ For example, a defendant could have two *nonviolent* 2-point offenses under §4A1.1(b) and four 1-point offenses under §4A1.1(c). Such a defendant **does not have** a prior 3-point offense, a violent 2-point offense, nor “more than 4 criminal history points,” excluding the four 1-point offenses, and would be eligible under the expanded safety valve. Although such a defendant could have committed more than four 1-point offenses, §4A1.1(c) instructs that no more than four 1-point offenses be counted for criminal history purposes. Thus, it is possible, though likely to be relatively rare, that a defendant could qualify for the expanded safety valve with eight criminal history points and also have additional 1-point offenses that are not counted under §4A1.1(c).

²² The Act does not provide any guidance as how to determine if the prior offense is a “crime of violence.” The court will likely use the categorical approach to determine whether the prior offense meets the definition of “crime of violence” at section 16. The definition at 18 U.S.C. § 16 is different from the definition of “crime of violence” in the *Guidelines Manual* at §4B1.2.

The term “offense” as used in subsections (a)(2)–(4) and “offense or offenses” as used in subsection (a)(5) mean the offense of conviction and all relevant conduct. See USSG §5C1.2, comment. (n.3). But for purposes of determining whether a defendant used violence or possessed a firearm (or induced another to do so), “defendant”, as used in subsection (a)(2), limits the accountability of the defendant to his own conduct and conduct that he aided or abetted, counseled, commanded, induced, procured, or willfully caused. See USSG §5C1.2, comment. (n.4). For example, even if a defendant’s offense level is increased pursuant to §2D1.1(b)(1) based on a co-conspirator’s possession of a weapon, this increase does not preclude defendant from meeting this safety-valve criterion. See, e.g., *United States v. Figueroa-Encarnacion*, 343 F.3d 23, 34–35 (1st Cir. 2003) (collecting cases); *United States v. Pena-Sarabia*, 297 F.3d 983, 987–89 & n.2 (10th Cir. 2002) (overruling prior circuit authority to the contrary). Cf. *United States v. Matias*, 465 F.3d 169, 173–74 (5th Cir. 2006) (while defendant may still qualify for safety-valve if co-conspirator possessed firearm, his own constructive possession of firearm would prevent application of safety-valve); accord *United States v. Jackson*, 552 F.3d 908, 909–10 (8th Cir. 2009) (collecting cases) (“there is no reason to distinguish between actual, physical possession and constructive possession when defining what constitutes ‘possession’ for purposes of § 5C1.2. Accordingly, we hold that constructive possession is sufficient to preclude a defendant from receiving safety valve relief under § 5C1.2.”).

In addition, the defendant might meet this criterion even if his or her offense level is increased pursuant to §2D1.1(b)(1) based on his or her own possession of a weapon. This result is possible because of the different standards of proof for application of §2D1.1(b)(1) (if weapon was present, defendant bears burden of proving it was “clearly improbable” that the weapon was connected with the offense) and §5C1.2(a)(2) (defendant bears burden of proving by preponderance of evidence that weapon was not connected with offense). See *United States v. Anderson*, 452 F.3d 87, 90–92 (1st Cir. 2006); *United States v. Zavalza-Rodriguez*, 379 F.3d 1182, 1187 (10th Cir. 2004) (“there is a difference in evidentiary standards when applying the two provisions [§2D1.1 and §5C1.2]”); *United States v. Nelson*, 222 F.3d 545, 549–50 (9th Cir. 2000). But see *United States v. Vasquez*, 161 F.3d 909, 911–12 (5th Cir. 1998) (per curiam) (“despite any difference in semantics between §§2D1.1(b)(1) and 5C1.2(2), the two provisions should be analyzed analogously.”).

c. No death or serious bodily injury

To determine whether this criterion is met, look beyond the offense of conviction to relevant conduct, see USSG §5C1.2, comment. (n.3); the inquiry is not limited to the defendant’s own conduct. Compare with USSG §5C1.2, comment. (n.4).

d. No leadership role adjustment

This criterion is not met if a defendant is subject to an aggravating role adjustment under §3B1.1. See USSG §5C1.2, comment. (n.5). See e.g., *United States v. Doe*, 613 F.3d 681,

690 (7th Cir. 2010) (“[b]ecause we find that [defendant’s] . . . sentence was properly enhanced under §3B1.1 for his aggravating role, he is ineligible for application of the safety-valve provision”).

In addition, this criterion is not met if a defendant was engaged in a continuing criminal enterprise. As Application Note 6 explains, a defendant engaged in a continuing criminal enterprise will not be eligible because: (1) safety valve does not apply to convictions under 21 U.S.C. § 848; and (2) by definition, a defendant engaged in a continuing criminal enterprise convicted of a covered offense will receive an aggravating role adjustment, see 21 U.S.C. § 848(c)(2)(A) and §3B1.1, and thus be ineligible for the reduction.

e. Full and truthful disclosure

The final criterion is that the defendant makes a full, truthful disclosure to the government no later than sentencing. Disclosure need not come by way of a private debriefing with the government. *See, e.g., United States v. De La Torre*, 599 F.3d 1198, 1207 (10th Cir. 2010) (“Though undoubtedly rare, there are circumstances in which trial testimony could be sufficiently thorough so as to constitute adequate compliance with this requirement. The language of USSG §5C1.2(a)(5) and 18 U.S.C. § 3553(f)(5) does not require the defendant to consent to a private de-briefing with the Government.”). It is important to note that §5C1.2(a)(5) specifically provides that “the fact that the defendant has no relevant or useful other information to provide or that the Government is already aware of the information” does not preclude the defendant from meeting this criterion. But nor does this provision permit a defendant “to withhold information on the ground that the government has secured it from another source.” *United States v. Pena*, 598 F.3d 289, 293 (6th Cir. 2010).

(i) **Full disclosure.** Section 5C1.2(a)(5) requires disclosure of “all information and evidence the defendant has concerning the offense or offenses that were part of the same course of conduct or of a common scheme or plan.” This includes information about other participants, regardless of whether defendant was convicted of conspiracy. *See, e.g., United States v. Stephenson*, 452 F.3d 1173, 1180 (10th Cir. 2006) (“[w]hen the offense involves conspiracy or a jointly undertaken criminal venture, we require the defendant to disclose not only everything he knows about his own actions, but also everything he knows about his co-conspirators.”); *United States v. Tinajero*, 469 F.3d 722, 725 (8th Cir. 2006) (defendant convicted of aiding and abetting amphetamine distribution denied safety-valve for minimizing his role); *United States v. Woods*, 210 F.3d 70, 76 (1st Cir. 2000).

(ii) **Truthful disclosure.** The courts are split as to whether, despite prior lies and omissions to the Government, a defendant can still be eligible for

the safety valve so long as the defendant makes a complete and truthful proffer no later than the commencement of the sentencing hearing. Compare *United States v. Mejia-Pimental*, 477 F.3d 1100, 1105 (9th Cir. 2007) (“‘lies and obstruction’ before sentencing do not preclude safety valve eligibility”); *United States v. Madrigal*, 327 F.3d 738, 743–44 (8th Cir. 2003), with *United States v. Fletcher*, 74 F.3d 49, 56 (4th Cir. 1996) (given the lower court’s finding of defendant’s perjury at trial, “it is not illogical to assume that the judge similarly determined that Fletcher failed to comply with the fifth condition in 18 U.S.C. § 3553(f).”); *United States v. Edwards*, 65 F.3d 430, 433 (5th Cir. 1995).

The courts are also split as to whether information provided to the government for purposes of the safety valve must be both objectively and subjectively truthful. Compare *United States v. Thompson*, 76 F.3d 166, 170–71 (7th Cir. 1996) (defendant qualified for safety valve where she was “forthright within the range of her ability,” given that she had low level of cognitive functioning, an elevated need for approval from others, and a limited ability to question and analyze her surrounding circumstances); *United States v. Sherpa*, 110 F.3d 656, 659–63 (9th Cir. 1996) (affirming application of safety valve where jury convicted defendant, but judge held that defendant was being truthful in denying knowledge that he was carrying drugs), with *United States v. Reynoso*, 239 F.3d 143, 144, 150 (2d Cir. 2000) (requirement not satisfied where defendant, who suffered from organic memory impairment, provided information that she subjectively believed to be truthful but was objectively untruthful).

(iii) **Disclosure to the Government.** Courts have interpreted the “government” to mean the prosecutorial authority, see *United States v. Jimenez-Martinez*, 83 F.3d 488, 495–96 (1st Cir. 1996), or the government’s attorney, see *United States v. Contreras*, 136 F.3d 1245, 1246 (9th Cir. 1998). Therefore, disclosure to a probation officer does not satisfy the requirement. *United States v. Cervantes*, 519 F.3d 1254, 1257 (10th Cir. 2008) (“We agree with our sister circuits and hold that a defendant does not meet the requirements of the ‘safety valve’ provision merely by meeting with a probation officer during the presentence investigation.”) (collecting cases).

Note. A defendant is not, however, required to give information to a specific government attorney. See *United States v. Real-Hernandez*, 90 F.3d 356, 361 (9th Cir. 1996).

(iv) **Disclosure not later than sentencing.** Courts are split as to whether “not later than the time of the sentencing hearing” means before the

commencement of the first sentencing hearing or before the hearing at which the defendant is sentenced. *Compare United States v. Madrigal*, 327 F.3d 738, 747 (8th Cir. 2003) (holding that continued sentencing hearing did not deprive district court of jurisdiction to grant safety valve relief), *with United States v. Marin*, 144 F.3d 1085, 1094–95 (7th Cir. 1998) (reversing where district court continued sentencing hearing numerous times to “coax the truth out of” the defendant).

2. Section 5C1.2(b)

If a defendant meets the criteria and his statutorily required minimum sentence is at least five years, the offense level applicable from Chapters Two and Three cannot be less than level 17.

3. Safety Valve and §2D1.1(b)(17)

If the district court finds that the defendant failed to disclose everything he knew concerning his offense and relevant conduct, it may deny the 2-level “safety valve” reduction under §2D1.1(b)(17). *United States v. Virgen-Chavarin*, 350 F.3d 1122, 1130 (10th Cir. 2003). The 2-level reduction applies regardless of whether the defendant was convicted of a crime carrying a mandatory minimum sentence and irrespective of the minimum offense level provision of §5C1.2(b). *See* USSG §2D1.1, comment. (n.21). A defendant may also qualify for the reduction under §2D1.1(b)(17) even if the defendant is convicted of a statute that is not listed at §5C1.2(a) and excluded from operation of the statutory safety valve reduction. *See id.*

4. Safety Valve and Departures/Variations

Departures or variations below the mandatory minimum sentence are permissible when the safety valve is applied, including a downward departure under §5K1.1 (Substantial Assistance).

C. DOWNWARD DEPARTURES FOR SUBSTANTIAL ASSISTANCE TO AUTHORITIES: §5K1.1

A district court may depart below a guideline minimum sentence where the government has filed a substantial assistance motion pursuant to §5K1.1 based on the defendant’s substantial assistance in the investigation or prosecution of another person who has committed an offense. *See* USSG §5K1.1.

Before a court may impose a substantial assistance reduction below a statutory mandatory minimum, the government must make a motion pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3553(e) specifically requesting or authorizing the district court to impose a sentence below a level established by statute as a mandatory minimum sentence. *Melendez v. United States*, 518

U.S. 120, 122 (1996). Otherwise, the court may only depart down from the guideline range to the statutory minimum sentence. *Id.* at 130–31.

When the guideline range falls below the statutory mandatory minimum sentence, and the government files a motion pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3553(e), the appropriate starting point for the downward departure is the statutory mandatory minimum sentence. *United States v. Li*, 206 F.3d 78, 89 (1st Cir. 2000); *United States v. Cordero*, 313 F.3d 161, 165 (3d Cir. 2002); *United States v. Hayes*, 5 F.3d 292, 294–95 (7th Cir. 1993); *United States v. Schaffer*, 110 F.3d 530, 533–34 (8th Cir. 1997); *United States v. Head*, 178 F.3d 1205, 1207–08 (11th Cir. 1999).

When a district court departs below a mandatory minimum sentence based on substantial assistance, only factors that relate to the defendant’s substantial assistance may influence the extent of the departure. *See United States v. Williams*, 687 F.3d 283 (6th Cir. 2012); *see also United States v. Winebarger*, 664 F.3d 388, 396 (3d Cir. 2011).

X. CHAPTER SIX: SENTENCING PROCEDURES AND PLEA AGREEMENTS

A. PLEA AGREEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Because of the potential impact of a plea agreement in a drug case, there are several considerations that should be taken into account: (1) the type of plea agreement; (2) whether it is a binding agreement; and (3) whether and how a plea agreement limits the consideration of the defendant’s conduct or of certain relevant conduct.

1. Agreement to Not Pursue Further Charges

A plea agreement may specify that the prosecutor will not bring, or will move to dismiss, other charges. *See Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(A)*. The court may accept, reject, or defer a decision regarding such an agreement until after the review of the presentence report. *See Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(3)(A)*.

2. Agreement as to Sentence Recommendation

A plea agreement may specify that the prosecutor recommends, or agrees not to oppose, a defendant’s request that a particular sentence or sentencing range is appropriate, or that a particular sentencing factor or guideline applies or does not apply in the case. *See Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(B)*. Such a recommendation is not binding on the court and the defendant should be advised that if the court does not follow the recommendation the defendant has no right to withdraw the plea. *See Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(3)(B)*.

3. Agreement as to Sentence to be Imposed

A plea agreement may include an agreement between the parties that a specific sentence or range is the appropriate disposition of the case, or that a particular sentencing provision or factor does or does not apply in the case. *See* Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(C). The court may accept, reject or defer a decision regarding such an agreement until after review of the presentence report. *See* Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(3)(A). Once the court has accepted such an agreement, the sentencing stipulations reflected in the agreement are binding on the court. *See* Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(4).

4. Withdrawal of Plea

If the court rejects a plea agreement that contains provisions of the type specified in Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(A) or (C), the court must give the defendant an opportunity to withdraw the plea. *See* Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(5)(B).

B. THE GUIDELINES' TREATMENT OF PLEA AGREEMENTS

1. Policy Statements

Chapter Six of the guidelines sets forth standards for the courts' consideration of plea agreements.

2. Section 6B1.1 (Plea Agreement Procedure (Policy Statement))

This guideline parallels the procedural requirements of Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c). In the commentary to this section, the Commission recommends that the court defer acceptance of plea agreements of the types specified in Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(A) or (C) until the court has reviewed the presentence report.

3. Guideline Standards for Accepting Plea Agreement

Chapter Six of the guidelines provides standards to guide courts in their decisions about plea agreements. These standards go beyond the requirements imposed by Rule 11.

In the case of a plea agreement that includes the dismissal of any charges or an agreement not to pursue potential charges (Rule 11(c)(1)(A)), the court may accept the agreement, for reasons stated on the record, if the remaining charges adequately reflect the seriousness of the actual offense behavior and accepting the agreement will not undermine the statutory purposes of sentencing or the sentencing guidelines. *See* USSG §6B1.2(a). However, conduct underlying dismissed charges or charges not proved may be considered relevant conduct in connection with the count(s) of which the defendant is convicted. *See id.*; *United States v. Grissom*, 525 F.3d 691, 697 (9th Cir. 2008). In addition, the court may

consider conduct underlying charges dismissed pursuant to a plea agreement in determining whether to depart from the sentencing guidelines. *See* USSG §5K2.21.

In the case of a plea agreement that includes a nonbinding recommendation or sentence (Rule 11(c)(1)(B)) or an agreement for a specific sentence (Rule 11(c)(1)(C)), the court may accept the recommendation if the court is satisfied either that: (1) the recommended or agreed upon sentence is within the applicable guideline range; or (2) the recommended or agreed upon sentence departs from the applicable guideline range for justifiable reasons, and those reasons are set forth in writing in the statement of reasons or judgment and commitment order. *See* USSG §6B1.2(b), (c).

C. SECTION 1B1.8 (USE OF CERTAIN INFORMATION)

There are limitations on using information provided in the course of a defendant's cooperation in calculating his guideline range. Section 1B1.8 provides that "where a defendant agrees to cooperate with the government by providing information concerning unlawful activities of others, and as part of that cooperation agreement the government agrees that self-incriminating information provided pursuant to the agreement will not be used against the defendant, then such information shall not be used in determining the applicable guideline range, except to the extent provided in the agreement" and under other circumstances listed in §1B1.8. *See, e.g., United States v. Hodge*, 469 F.3d 749, 757 (8th Cir. 2006) ("[w]hile a § 1B1.8 agreement precludes the Government from using the self-incriminating information in the calculation of the proper Guidelines range, absent such an agreement, self-incriminating information is properly considered in calculating the advisory Guidelines range"); *United States v. Shorteeth*, 887 F.2d 253, 255 (10th Cir. 1989); *United States v. Jarman*, 144 F.3d 912, 914–15 (6th Cir. 1998) (§1B1.8 "unquestionably forbids the government to influence the sentencing range by disclosing revelations made by a defendant in the course of cooperation required by a plea agreement").

Thus, pursuant to §1B1.8, a court may not, in calculating the guideline range, use information disclosed by a defendant in the course of cooperating. Consequently, information, such as additional drug transactions in which the defendant has participated, may not be used to determine drug quantity if that information was provided by the defendant under the circumstances set forth in §1B1.8. *See, e.g., United States v. Gonzalez*, 309 F.3d 882, 887 (5th Cir. 2002) (prosecutor improperly used information gained under §1B1.8 to support its argument for leadership role enhancement); *United States v. Thornton*, 306 F.3d 1355, 1357–58 (3d Cir. 2002) (although sentence affirmed on other grounds, §1B1.8 violated where defendant's admissions confirming presence of guns in house was basis for firearm enhancement). *But see United States v. Milan*, 398 F.3d 445, 456 (6th Cir. 2005) (sentencing guidelines permit district court to consider proffer statements of codefendant in determining defendant's sentence).

The defendant must be providing information concerning the criminal activities of "others" in order to qualify under §1B1.8. *See* USSG §1B1.8, comment. (n.6).

The government must have agreed that the self-incriminating information provided pursuant to the cooperation agreement will not be used against the defendant. *See* USSG §1B1.8; *see also United States v. Cruz*, 156 F.3d 366, 370–71 (2d Cir. 1998) (§1B1.8 does not cover proffer agreements); *United States v. Baird*, 218 F.3d 221, 228–29 (3d Cir. 2000) (the agreement need not cite to §1B1.8 to fall within its purview); *United States v. Ykema*, 887 F.2d 697, 699 (6th Cir. 1989) (concluding that mere promise that “no additional charges” would be brought did not preclude sentence based on drug quantity higher than that stipulated in plea agreement).

Section 1B1.8 does not prohibit disclosure of information provided in a plea agreement to the sentencing court, but rather, it prohibits this information from being used to determine the applicable guideline range. *See* USSG §1B1.8, comment. (n.1); *United States v. Gonzalez*, 309 F.3d 882, 886–87 (5th Cir. 2002).

Section 1B1.8 does not restrict the use of all information that a defendant may disclose in the course of his cooperation. This information may be used in determining a defendant’s sentencing range if: (1) it was known to the government prior to entering into the cooperation agreement, *see United States v. Wilson*, 106 F.3d 1140, 1144 n.5 (3d Cir. 1997); (2) it concerns the existence of prior convictions and sentences in determining criminal history and career offender; (3) there is a prosecution for perjury or giving a false statement; (4) there is a breach of the cooperation agreement by the defendant, *United States v. Bradbury*, 189 F.3d 200, 206 (2d Cir. 1999); or (5) it is relevant in determining whether, or to what extent, a downward departure is warranted for substantial assistance under §5K1.1. *See* USSG §1B1.8.

Because the defendant gets “use” immunity, and not “transactional” immunity, information independently obtained from other sources, such as codefendants, may be considered. *See United States v. Pham*, 463 F.3d 1239, 1244 (11th Cir. 2006) (per curiam) (“so long as the information is obtained from independent sources or separately gleaned from codefendants, it may be used at sentencing without violating § 1B1.8”); *United States v. Baird*, 218 F.3d 221, 231 (3d Cir. 2000); *United States v. Boyd*, 901 F.2d 842, 845 (10th Cir. 1990) (unless the information was elicited solely as a result of, or prompted by, the defendant’s cooperation.) *See United States v. Gibson*, 48 F.3d 876, 879 (5th Cir. 1995) (per curiam); *United States v. Davis*, 912 F.2d 1210, 1213 (10th Cir. 1990). The government bears the burden of establishing that the evidence it wants to use was derived from a legitimate source independent of the defendant. *See, e.g., United States v. Taylor*, 277 F.3d 721, 725 (5th Cir. 2001).

The information may be used to determine whether, or to what extent, a downward departure from the guidelines is warranted pursuant to a government motion under §5K1.1. *See United States v. Mills*, 329 F.3d 24, 28–29 (1st Cir. 2003); *United States v. McFarlane*, 309 F.3d 510, 515 (8th Cir. 2002). For example, a court may refuse to depart

downward on the basis of such information, but should not use the information to depart upward. *See* USSG §1B1.8, comment. (n.1).