


GAO
 Accountability Integrity Reliability
Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-155](#), a report to Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, and Fisheries, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Why GAO Did This Study

The September 11th attacks affected the scope of activities of many federal agencies, including the Coast Guard. Homeland security, a long-standing but relatively small part of the Coast Guard's duties, took center stage. Still, the Coast Guard remains responsible for many other missions, such as helping stem the flow of drugs and illegal migration, protecting important fishing grounds, and responding to marine pollution. GAO was asked to review the Coast Guard's current efforts and future plans for balancing resource levels among its many missions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Coast Guard:

- Develop a longer-term strategy that outlines how the Coast Guard sees its resources being distributed across its various missions, and a time frame for achieving this desired balance.
- Develop and implement a useful reporting format that allows the Congress to understand and assess the progress in implementing this strategy.
- Reexamine recommendations from past studies of the agency's operations as a way to identify and improve operational efficiencies and help leverage resources.

The Coast Guard reviewed a draft of this report but did not take a formal position on GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-155.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact JayEtta Hecker at (202) 512-2834 or heckerj@gao.gov.

COAST GUARD

Strategy Needed for Setting and Monitoring Levels of Effort for All Missions

What GAO Found

As the Coast Guard adjusts to its new post-September 11th environment, it will likely take several years to determine how best to balance carrying out nonsecurity missions alongside new security responsibilities. In recent months the Coast Guard has increased its level of effort in nonsecurity activities such as drug interdiction and fisheries patrols, but some of these activities remain below earlier levels. For example, patrol boats formerly used for drug interdiction are still being used for harbor security patrols. Substantial increases in nonsecurity activities are also unlikely in the near future, because the mission-related initiatives proposed in the fiscal year 2003 budget are directed primarily at security missions. Most notably, most of the proposed 1,330 new staff would replace reserve staff activated after September 11th.

The Coast Guard has not yet developed a strategy for showing, even in general terms, the levels of effort it plans for its various missions in future years. Understandably, the Coast Guard's attention has been focused on assimilating added security responsibilities. However, developing a more comprehensive strategy is now important, as a way to inform the Congress about the extent to which the Coast Guard's use of its resources—cutters, boats, aircraft, and personnel—will allow it to continue meeting its many responsibilities. Also important is designing a way to keep the Congress informed about its progress in achieving this balance. The Coast Guard has considerable data from which to develop progress reports, but this information is currently in disparate forms and documents.



Coast Guard patrol boats like this one, formerly used mainly in activities such as intercepting drugs or illegal immigrants, were still being used extensively for harbor security patrols in mid-2002.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard.