

Why GAO Did This Study

Within DHS, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) OAM deploys the largest law enforcement air force in the world. In support of homeland security missions, OAM provides aircraft, vessels, and crew at the request of its customers, primarily Border Patrol, which is responsible for enforcing border security, and tracks its ability to meet requests. GAO was asked to determine the extent to which OAM (1) met its customers' requests; (2) has taken steps to ensure its mix and placement of resources effectively met mission needs and addressed threats; and (3) coordinated the use of its assets with the USCG, which is to execute its maritime security mission using its assets. GAO reviewed DHS policies, interviewed OAM, Border Patrol, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and USCG officials in headquarters and in 4 field locations selected on factors, such as threats and operating environments. Results from these field visits are not generalizable. GAO analyzed OAM support request data for fiscal year 2010, and surveyed OAM and USCG officials at 86 proximately located units to determine the extent of cooperation between the two agencies. This report is a public version of a law enforcement sensitive report GAO issued in February 2012. Information deemed sensitive has been redacted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that CBP reassess decisions and document its analyses for its asset mix and placement, and that DHS enhance oversight to ensure effective coordination of OAM and USCG resources, and DHS concurred.

View [GAO-12-518](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

Opportunities Exist to Ensure More Effective Use of DHS's Air and Marine Assets

What GAO Found

GAO's analysis of the Office of Air and Marine (OAM) data found that OAM met 73 percent of the 38,662 air support requests and 88 percent of the 9,913 marine support requests received in fiscal year 2010. The level of support differed by location, customers, and type of mission. For example, in its northern region OAM met air support requests 77 percent of the time and in its southeast region, it met these requests 60 percent of the time. The main reasons for unmet air and marine support requests were maintenance and adverse weather, respectively. OAM has taken actions, such as developing an aircraft modernization plan and purchasing all-weather vessels, to address these issues.

OAM could benefit from taking additional steps to better ensure that its mix and placement of resources meets mission needs and addresses threats. GAO's analysis of OAM's fiscal year 2010 performance results indicate that OAM did not meet its national performance goal to fulfill greater than 95 percent of Border Patrol air support requests and did not provide higher rates of support in locations designated as high priority based on threats. For example, one high-priority Border Patrol sector had the fifth highest support rate across all nine sectors on the southwest border. OAM could benefit from reassessing the mix and placement of its assets and personnel, using performance results to inform these decisions. Such a reassessment could help provide OAM with reasonable assurance that it is most effectively allocating scarce resources and aligning them to fulfill mission needs and related threats. Additionally, OAM has not documented its analyses to support its asset mix and placement across locations. For example, OAM's fiscal year 2010 deployment plan stated that OAM deployed aircraft and maritime vessels to ensure that its forces were positioned to best meet field commanders' needs and respond to emerging threats, but OAM did not have documentation that clearly linked the deployment decisions in the plan to these goals. Such documentation could improve transparency to help demonstrate the effectiveness of its decisions in meeting mission needs and addressing threats.

GAO's analysis of OAM and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) air and marine survey responses indicated that they coordinated with their proximately located counterparts more frequently for activities directly related to carrying out their respective agencies' missions (mission-related activities) than for mission support activities. For example, within mission-related activities, 54 percent of the 86 respondents reported sharing intelligence on a frequent basis and, within mission-support activities, about 15 percent reported that they frequently coordinated for maintenance requests. Survey respondents, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) analyses, and GAO site visits confirm that opportunities exist to improve certain types of coordination, such as colocating proximate OAM and USCG units, which currently share some marine and no aviation facilities. In addition, DHS does not have an active program office dedicated to the coordination of aviation or maritime issues. DHS could benefit from assessing actions it could take to improve coordination across a range of air and marine activities, including reconstituting departmental oversight councils, to better leverage existing resources, eliminate unnecessary duplication, and enhance efficiencies.