

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-13](#), a report to congressional committees.

Why GAO Did This Study

The Coast Guard, within DHS, is responsible for, among other things, protecting the marine environment and guarding the nation's vast coastline and ports. Using performance goals—comprised of measures, timeframes, and targets—the Coast Guard assesses and communicates its performance.

The Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015 included a provision for GAO to review the Coast Guard's performance goals. This report examines: (1) the extent the Coast Guard developed and reported goals that align with each of its missions and address core activities, (2) the extent the Coast Guard and DHS have processes to ensure that data for selected goals are reliable, and (3) the explanations and corrective actions the Coast Guard reported for selected met and unmet goals during fiscal years 2011 through 2015. GAO reviewed applicable laws, policies, and guidance. GAO reviewed the reliability and results of 7 of the Coast Guard's 38 performance goals to include a variety of performance results, data sources, and missions, and interviewed Coast Guard and DHS officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Coast Guard develop new performance goals or describe how existing goals are sufficient, publicly report its goals, assess the extent limitations in performance data are documented, document measurable corrective actions and implementation time frames, as well as document efforts to monitor implementation of corrective actions. DHS concurred with all five recommendations.

View [GAO-18-13](#). For more information, contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or groverj@gao.gov.

October 2017

COAST GUARD

Actions Needed to Enhance Performance Information Transparency and Monitoring

What GAO Found

The U.S. Coast Guard's (Coast Guard) performance goals generally align with its 11 statutory missions. However, GAO found that the goals representing 5 of the 11 missions do not fully address all related mission activities. For example, despite the Coast Guard's mission to interdict all illegal drugs, the agency's two performance goals related to that mission are for cocaine interdiction only, excluding many other substances. Developing new goals to address missions, or describing how existing goals sufficiently assess mission performance, could better convey the Coast Guard's progress in achieving its missions to decision makers and the public. The Coast Guard also does not report all of its performance goals in publicly available documents, limiting congressional and public awareness of the Coast Guard's ability to meet its missions.

Figure: Elements of the Coast Guard's Performance Assessment Process



Source: GAO. | GAO-18-13

The Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have processes intended to ensure the reliability of performance data for the seven selected goals that GAO reviewed. However, the Coast Guard does not consistently document its data limitations for internal and external audiences. For example, the Coast Guard did not document limitations with its performance goal regarding the number of detected incursions of foreign fishing vessels violating U.S. waters. While the Coast Guard reported taking steps to address data limitations with two of the seven selected performance goals that GAO reviewed, the extent of such limitations are not clearly documented. Assessing the extent to which performance data limitations are documented could provide greater transparency regarding the reliability of these data.

Additionally, for the same selected seven goals, GAO found that the Coast Guard documented an explanation for why it did or did not meet each performance goal reported to DHS, as well as corrective actions for each unmet goal. However, the Coast Guard's corrective actions were not measurable and did not include time frames for implementation. For example, the Coast Guard did not report measurable actions or time frames for evaluating whether additional resources were needed to address its cocaine interdiction goal. The Coast Guard also did not document its efforts to monitor whether the corrective actions it developed for unmet performance goals were implemented or evaluate whether they had the intended effect. Documenting these efforts could enable the Coast Guard to determine whether these actions have been implemented, if they have mitigated any performance gaps, and continue to plan and prioritize its operations to target performance gaps, which is consistent with federal standards for internal control.