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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-868](#), a report to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

As part of international efforts to ensure maritime safety and security—and to carry out its mandates under the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002—the U.S. Coast Guard is developing an automatic identification system (AIS) that should enable it to monitor ships traveling to and through U.S. waters. For AIS to operate nationwide, ships need equipment to transmit and receive AIS signals, and the Coast Guard needs shore stations and designated radio frequencies to keep track of the ships' identities and movements. Yet unresolved frequency issues between the Coast Guard and a private company, MariTEL, have come before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

GAO reviewed federal agencies' progress in developing AIS nationwide and identified certain challenges and opportunities in completing the work.

What GAO Recommends

To help reduce federal costs and speed development of AIS nationwide, GAO recommends that, depending on the FCC's response, the Coast Guard seek and take advantage of opportunities to partner with local private and public organizations willing to develop AIS facilities on shore at their own expense.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-868.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Margaret Wrightson at (415) 904-2000 or WrightsonM@gao.gov.

MARITIME SECURITY

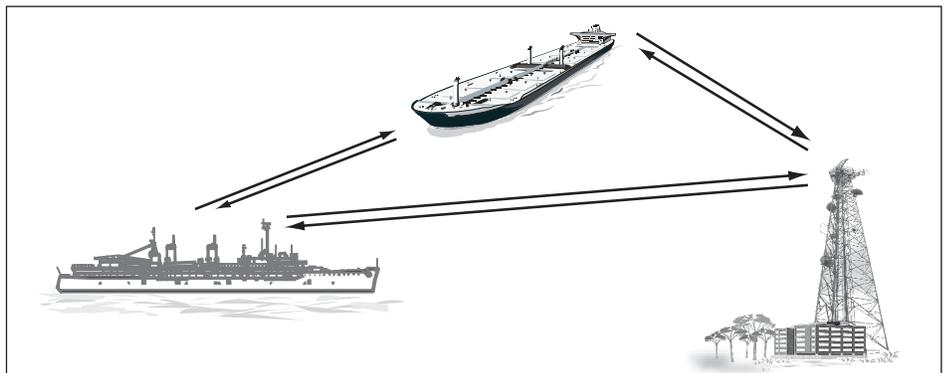
Partnering Could Reduce Federal Costs and Facilitate Implementation of Automatic Vessel Identification System

What GAO Found

Because the Coast Guard is in the early stages of progress toward nationwide AIS development, the total cost and completion time are uncertain. The Coast Guard has taken advantage of opportunities to bring AIS into service quickly in 10 areas where vessel-monitoring technology already exists, and it is simultaneously defining and planning for full nationwide coverage. The Coast Guard has only preliminary cost estimates for a nationwide system, because geographic and other factors will affect installation at different locations. The Coast Guard estimates that planning and testing will be completed, and a request for proposals from potential contractors issued, between December 2004 and February 2005.

The Coast Guard faces both challenges and potential opportunities in its development of a nationwide AIS. Nationwide development depends in part on how FCC resolves a continuing dispute between federal agencies and MariTEL over issues including who should have access to the internationally designated AIS frequencies and for what uses. To help protect its licensed rights to certain frequencies, MariTEL generally seeks either sole control over the international standard AIS frequencies or shared control with ships and the federal government. The federal government seeks a resolution that will reserve the internationally designated frequencies for AIS use by government and nongovernment entities. FCC expects to respond in summer 2004. This response—and whether it leads to any additional actions on the part of the interested parties—could affect the overall cost and pace of nationwide AIS development. Depending on FCC's response, one factor that offers an opportunity to reduce federal costs is that some local port entities are willing to assume the expense and responsibility for AIS construction if they can use AIS data, along with the Coast Guard, for their own purposes.

AIS Sends Detailed Vessel Information via Radio Signals (arrows) from Ship to Ship and Ship to Shore



Source: CorelDraw, Adobe Illustrator, and U.S. Coast Guard.