

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Coast Guard—a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—is responsible for establishing Interagency Operations Centers (IOC) in response to provisions of the Security and Accountability For Every (SAFE) Port Act of 2006. IOCs are designed to, among other things, share maritime information with the Coast Guard's port partners (other agencies and organizations it coordinates with). To facilitate IOCs, the Coast Guard is implementing an information-management and sharing system called WatchKeeper. GAO was asked to assess IOC and WatchKeeper implementation. This report addresses the extent to which (1) DHS and the Coast Guard have implemented IOCs, (2) port partners use WatchKeeper and the Coast Guard has facilitated its use to enhance IOC capabilities, and (3) the Coast Guard has adhered to established guidance in defining WatchKeeper requirements and its associated cost and schedule. GAO analyzed laws and documents, such as implementation plans, and interviewed Coast Guard and port-partner officials at the first four sectors (field locations) where WatchKeeper was implemented. The results of the four sector visits are not generalizable, but provide insights.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Coast Guard collect data on port partners' access and use of WatchKeeper; develop, document, and implement a process on how to incorporate port-partner input; implement requirements-development practices; and revise the cost estimate and the integrated master schedule. DHS concurred subject to the availability of funds.

View [GAO-12-202](#). For more information, contact Stephen L. Caldwell at (202) 512-9610 or [caldwells@gao.gov](mailto:caldwells@gao.gov).

## MARITIME SECURITY

### Coast Guard Needs to Improve Use and Management of Interagency Operations Centers

## What GAO Found

DHS and the Coast Guard did not meet the SAFE Port Act's requirement that IOCs be established at high-priority ports by October 2009, in part because the Coast Guard was not appropriated funds to establish the IOCs until 14 months after enactment of the law, and the definition of an IOC was evolving during this period. However, the Coast Guard plans to establish IOCs at all 35 of its sectors. According to the Coast Guard's analysis of sector status reports, none of its sectors have achieved IOCs with full operating capability. According to the Coast Guard's Chief of IOC Implementation, as well as its Information Sharing Executive Agent, continued support is needed from DHS to increase port-partner participation and the success of the IOC initiative. DHS has recently begun to support efforts to increase port-partner participation and further IOC implementation, such as facilitating the review of an IOC management directive. It is too early to determine, though, if and when IOCs will achieve their intended goal of sharing information and coordinating operations with port partners.

The Coast Guard has granted WatchKeeper access to port partners at 11 of the 12 sectors where it has been installed, but more than 80 percent of those port partners did not log on from July through September 2011. As of October 2011, the Coast Guard no longer collects data on port partners' access and use of WatchKeeper. Without such data, it will be difficult for the Coast Guard to determine whether WatchKeeper is facilitating the IOC program in meeting its goals of improving information sharing and coordination of joint operations. GAO interviewed 22 port partners who were not using WatchKeeper. Of those 22, the most frequently cited reason (by 7 port partners) is that it does not help them perform their missions. The Coast Guard primarily consulted with Customs and Border Protection when developing WatchKeeper, but did not solicit input from all port partners. Without developing, documenting, and implementing a process on how it will incorporate port partners' feedback into future WatchKeeper requirements, the Coast Guard does not have reasonable assurance that WatchKeeper will satisfy the needs of port partners and facilitate IOC goals.

The Coast Guard has not defined WatchKeeper requirements, cost, and schedule in accordance with established guidance. For example, the Coast Guard designed and developed the initial WatchKeeper segment without first defining the specific functions that the system is to perform. Further, the Coast Guard has not developed a reliable cost estimate to guide and inform the WatchKeeper investment. For example, the estimate does not include all government costs, such as related program-management costs. Also, WatchKeeper development and deployment has not been guided by a reliable schedule of the work needed to be performed and the key activities that need to occur. In particular, the schedule does not link all activities so that the project office can determine how a slip in a particular task may affect other related tasks, or the overall schedule. Project officials attributed these limitations to an aggressive IOC development schedule, limited resources, and competing priorities. As a result, these limitations increase the risk that WatchKeeper capabilities will not meet mission needs and will not be delivered on time and within budget.