

COAST GUARD

Timely Actions Needed to Address Risks in Using Rotational Crews

Why GAO Did This Study

The Coast Guard is in the process of replacing its 12 aging high-endurance cutters with 8 NSCs. The NSCs are to achieve increased operational performance compared to the legacy cutters they are replacing, in part, by using rotating crews.

GAO was asked to assess the Coast Guard's use of the CRC to increase NSC operational performance. This report examines (1) the extent to which the Coast Guard has made progress in testing the CRC and increasing the NSCs' operational performance, (2) the extent to which the Coast Guard has addressed risks affecting the CRC test and implementation, and (3) the extent to which the Coast Guard's performance measure allows it to accurately measure NSC operational performance.

GAO analyzed NSC acquisition and planning documents; DAFHP data from fiscal years 2011 to 2014; and studies on aspects of CRC implementation, such as scheduling, and interviewed Coast Guard officials and senior officers of all three NSCs deployed as of October 2014.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that the Coast Guard (1) fulfill its recommended NSC staffing requirements, (2) specify mitigating actions to address risk factors identified in this report, (3) develop interim milestones for the mitigation actions to be taken, and (4) develop a timeframe for implementing alternative operational performance measures prior to CRC testing. The Department of Homeland Security concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-15-195](#). For more information, contact Jennifer A. Grover at (202) 512-7141 or groverj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Coast Guard has delayed the feasibility test for using the crew rotation concept (CRC) to achieve increased operational days at sea with its National Security Cutters (NSC) until 2019. In 2006, the Coast Guard decided to use the CRC for its NSCs and that implementation would begin in 2011. However, the Coast Guard has postponed CRC testing because of delays in NSC deliveries and needed structural enhancements. In fiscal year 2013, the Coast Guard began implementing an interim plan to increase the NSCs' operational performance, not by rotating crews, but by adding crew members to help bear the increased workload. However, the added crew members do not have the skill mix recommended by a 2011 manpower requirements analysis. Without the appropriate crew members with the right skill mix, the NSCs may not be able to complete all mission requirements or required maintenance.

The Coast Guard has not fully addressed a variety of risks that could affect the success of its planned CRC feasibility test and goal to increase NSC operational days away from home port (DAFHP) from 185 to 230 days per year using the CRC. Further, the Coast Guard could not provide us with complete details about whether the CRC plan, to be completed by the end of 2017, will include actions to address and effectively mitigate various risks, to include

- determining the appropriate number and skill mix of NSC crew members and support personnel and whether they will be in place in time for the CRC test;
- incorporating actual NSC maintenance needs when developing NSC maintenance schedules and goals;
- testing the CRC under realistic circumstances, such as addressing the misalignment of the crewing concept to be tested as compared to the NSC homeporting plan;
- addressing the potential impacts of wide variations between alternative deployment schedules using the CRC; and
- implementing a training infrastructure and providing training support for off-cycle rotating crews.

As the Coast Guard continues to develop its CRC plan, establishing interim milestones for carrying out the actions needed to address and effectively mitigate these risks would help ensure that it addresses the risks in a timely manner.

The Coast Guard's current measure does not accurately quantify the operational performance of the NSC fleet. The Coast Guard primarily uses the DAFHP measure across its major cutter fleet; however, this measure includes days when a cutter is undergoing maintenance away from its home port and, as a result, will likely overstate the number of operational days. The Coast Guard has known of the measure's limitation for years and is exploring alternatives. However, since the CRC plan is premised on achieving 230 DAFHP per year—and that other Coast Guard vessels, such as the Offshore Patrol Cutter, also plan to use the DAFHP metric—implementing alternative measures prior to CRC testing will better ensure the test results are benchmarked against a more appropriate goal to quantify the operational performance of its fleet of NSCs and its planned fleet of Offshore Patrol Cutters.