

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-408T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Coast Guard, a component of DHS, serves as the principal federal agency responsible for maritime safety, security, and environmental stewardship in U.S. ports and waterways. To ensure that the Coast Guard is effectively fulfilling its missions, agency managers must have accurate information and base decisions on sound analyses for effective program management.

This statement discusses Coast Guard actions needed to (1) improve the quality of data used for program management and (2) improve the transparency of its data for reporting on mission performance and planning.

This statement is based on relevant products GAO issued from June 2014 through December 2017 on Coast Guard strategic planning and management issues, as well as related recommendation follow-up conducted through February 2018. GAO reviewed applicable laws, regulations, policies and guidance. GAO also interviewed Coast Guard officials responsible for administering these programs and obtained information on how they used data to inform decisionmaking. GAO interviewed a range of stakeholders, including federal and industry officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations in this statement but has made them to the Coast Guard and DHS in the past on improving its program management through, among other things, better quality and more transparent data. DHS and the Coast Guard agreed with these recommendations and reported actions or plans to address them.

View [GAO-18-408T](#). For more information, contact Nathan Anderson at (202) 512-3841 or [andersonn@gao.gov](mailto:andersonn@gao.gov).

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## COAST GUARD

### Actions Needed to Improve Data Quality and Transparency for Reporting on Mission Performance and Capital Planning

## What GAO Found

GAO's prior work recommended multiple actions to improve the Coast Guard's program management by improving the quality of data it uses to manage and report on its mission performance. Specifically, GAO recommended actions such as collecting more complete data and clarifying the data limitations to facilitate more effective program management. For example, in December 2017, GAO found that more information is needed to calculate vessel safety statistics that could enhance the Coast Guard's knowledge about accident, injury, and fatality trends involving commercial fishing vessels. Having more complete information could be useful to carrying out its marine safety mission, and GAO recommended, among other things, that the Coast Guard ensure that data collected during commercial fishing vessel incident investigations is accurately captured. In 2018, the Coast Guard reported taking initial steps to capture more accurate data.

## Coast Guard Ships



Source: U.S. Coast Guard. | GAO-18-408T

GAO's prior work also identified areas where the Coast Guard could improve the transparency of the data it uses for reporting on its mission performance as well its capital planning purposes. For example, in an October 2017 report on performance goals, GAO found the Coast Guard's Annual Performance Report (APR) has not been released publicly since 2011. Consequently, there has not been full visibility over performance across all of the Coast Guard's missions. Coast Guard officials stated that a decision by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) leadership to limit the number of performance goals shared publicly had deterred the Coast Guard from public release of its APR. GAO recommended that APRs be available on the Coast Guard's website; the Coast Guard plans to publicly release future APRs. In addition, previous GAO reports found that the Coast Guard's annual 5-year capital investment plan, which projects acquisition funding needs for the upcoming 5 years, did not consistently reflect current total cost estimates or the effects of tradeoffs made as part of the annual budget cycle. GAO made recommendations to help the Coast Guard plan for future acquisitions and the difficult trade off decisions it will face given funding constraints. The Coast Guard agreed, but it is unclear when it will complete the 20-year plan.