

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-663](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS's operational components, primarily AMO and Border Patrol within CBP and Coast Guard, use aircraft and vessels to secure U.S. borders, support criminal investigations, and ensure maritime security and safety. Since DHS began operations in 2003, it has examined opportunities to integrate and coordinate CBP and Coast Guard air and marine operations, including identifying opportunities for potential efficiencies such as consolidation of operating locations.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 included a provision for GAO to review DHS's air and marine operations. This report examines, among other things, (1) CBP and Coast Guard air and marine mission activities across operating locations and (2) DHS assessments of components' operating locations for air and marine mission activities. GAO analyzed mission data; reviewed agency documentation; and met with DHS, CBP, and Coast Guard officials in headquarters and field locations. GAO conducted visits to air and marine operating locations along the northern, southwest, and southeast border in three states, chosen based upon border region, types of mission activities, and proximity of operating locations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS develop and implement a mechanism to compare costs across components' marine operating locations. DHS concurred with the recommendation.

View [GAO-20-663](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Assessment of Air and Marine Operating Locations Should Include Comparable Costs across All DHS Marine Operations

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard) share responsibility for patrolling and enforcing U.S. law along U.S. maritime borders and approaches (within 12 nautical miles seaward of the U.S. coast). The majority of CBP's air and marine mission activities across operating locations were for law enforcement activities from fiscal years 2016 through 2018. More specifically, GAO found that about 80 percent of air and marine mission activities from fiscal years 2016 through 2018 for CBP's Air and Marine Operations (AMO) were for law enforcement missions. These law enforcement missions include providing aerial support for investigations and detecting and interdicting illicit cross-border activity. Further, GAO found that over 90 percent of CBP's U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) riverine mission activities—vessels used to patrol rivers and lakes and interdict illicit cross-border activity—were for law enforcement activities from fiscal years 2016 through 2018.

For Coast Guard, training missions were the largest proportion of its air and marine mission activities across operating locations from fiscal years 2016 through 2018. In particular, GAO found that training missions comprised 52 percent and 43 percent of total mission hours at air stations and boat stations from fiscal years 2016 through 2018, respectively.

Examples of Department of Homeland Security Aircraft and Vessels



Source: GAO. | GAO-20-663

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has ongoing initiatives to support integration and consolidation of nearby CBP and Coast Guard operating locations for air and marine mission activities. While DHS has comparable CBP and Coast Guard cost information for air operations, it does not for marine operations. As part of its ongoing initiatives, DHS began an assessment in July 2019 to examine benefits and costs for consolidating air and marine operating locations, among other things, as part of its agency reform plan in response to Executive Order 13781. DHS developed and implemented a standard cost per flight hour methodology to compare costs between AMO and Coast Guard air operations; however, DHS has not developed and implemented a standard cost per float (vessel underway) hour methodology to compare costs between CBP and Coast Guard marine operations. Development and implementation of a standard cost per vessel underway hour methodology would help ensure that DHS has key information to support its ongoing initiatives to support integration and consolidation of nearby air and marine operating locations.

This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in May 2020. Information that DHS deemed sensitive has been omitted.