

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106695](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Securing the nation's borders against unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs and other contraband, and terrorist activities is a key part of the DHS's mission. With increased attention to overland routes in recent years, such as along the southwest border, criminal organizations use maritime routes to smuggle people, drugs, and weapons into the U.S. Within DHS, the Coast Guard and CBP share responsibility for securing the nation's maritime borders.

This statement discusses: (1) Coast Guard and CBP resources for maritime security and related federal coordination, (2) challenges these agencies have faced managing assets, and (3) related workforce challenges.

This statement is based on GAO's prior work on a variety of asset and workforce issues. For that work, GAO analyzed Coast Guard and CBP documentation and data and interviewed officials. For this statement, GAO also obtained updates on actions DHS has taken to address GAO's recommendations as of March 2023. For a full list of the reports, see [Related GAO Products](#) at the conclusion of this statement.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made 35 recommendations in the reports covered by this statement, including to improve comparability of asset operating costs and workforce assessment processes. As of March 2023, nine of 35 have been implemented, and 26 remain open. GAO continues to monitor the agencies' progress in implementing them.

View [GAO-23-106695](#). For more information, contact Heather MacLeod at (202) 512-8777 or macleodh@gao.gov.

March 23, 2023

MARITIME SECURITY

Coast Guard and CBP Efforts to Address Prior GAO Recommendations on Asset and Workforce Needs

What GAO Found

The Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employ assets—including aircraft and vessels—and personnel, to ensure maritime security and safety. Coast Guard and CBP also coordinate with the Department of Defense on the allocation of assets and specialized personnel in their efforts to counter the flow of illicit drugs.

GAO previously identified challenges Coast Guard and CBP face in managing maritime security assets. This includes determining the appropriate allocation of assets across geographic locations and in response to catastrophic events or emergencies, such as hurricanes, oil spills, and humanitarian events. For example, in September 2020, GAO found that the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) ability to assess the costs and benefits of consolidating Coast Guard and CBP operating locations was limited, in part due to the lack of a standard cost measure between the components. GAO recommended DHS develop and implement a way to compare costs. In September 2021, DHS implemented a standardized methodology for costs.

Coast Guard Personnel Conducting a Drug Interdiction Operation



Source: U.S. Coast Guard photo. | [GAO-23-106695](#)

The Coast Guard and CBP have taken steps to assess workforce needs. In February 2020, GAO found that the Coast Guard had assessed a small portion of its workforce needs and recommended that Coast Guard update its workforce plan with timeframes and milestones to meet its workforce assessment goals. As of March 2023, the Coast Guard reported that it had revised this plan and submitted it to Congress, as required. GAO is continuing to evaluate the plan. In June 2018, GAO found that CBP faced challenges meeting target hiring and retention levels, such as for law enforcement personnel. CBP implemented an agency-wide exit survey and uses data to inform retention efforts.