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Highlights

MARITIME SECURITY

Progress Made in Implementing Maritime Transportation Security Act, but Concerns Remain

Why GAO Did This Study

After the events of September 11, 2001, concerns were raised over the security of U.S. ports and waterways. In response to the concerns over port security, Congress passed the Maritime Transportation Security Act in November 2002. The act created a broad range of programs to improve the security conditions at the ports and along American waterways, such as identifying and tracking vessels, assessing security preparedness, and limiting access to sensitive areas. A number of executive agencies were delegated responsibilities to implement these programs and other provisions of the act.

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation asked GAO to conduct a review of the status of the agencies' efforts to implement the security requirements of the act. This testimony reflects GAO's preliminary findings; much of GAO's work in the area is still under way.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1155T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Margaret Wrightson, 415-904-2000, or wrightsonm@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Agencies responsible for implementing the security provisions of the Maritime Transportation Security Act have made progress in meeting their requirements. Thus far, GAO has obtained information about 43 of 46 specific action areas, and efforts are under way in 42 of them. For example, the Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security agency with lead responsibility for most of the assignments, has published six interim rules covering responsibilities ranging from security of port facilities to vessel identification systems. Two other agencies within the new department—the Transportation Security Administration and the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection—have actions under way in such areas as establishing an identification system for millions of port workers and setting information requirements for cargo. The Maritime Administration, a Department of Transportation agency, has already completed or is well into implementing such responsibilities as developing training for security personnel.

While much has been accomplished, GAO's review found five areas of concern. Three relate primarily to security issues:
- Only a limited number of ports covered by vessel identification system,
- Questions about the scope and quality of port security assessments, and
- Concerns related to approving security plans for foreign vessels.

Two relate primarily to organizational and operational matters:
- Potential duplication of maritime intelligence efforts, and
- Inconsistency with Port Security Grant Program requirements.

Coast Guard Vessels Enforcing a Security Zone Around a Cruise Ship

Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

United States General Accounting Office