



COAST GUARD

Challenges during the Transition to the Department of Homeland Security

Highlights of GAO-03-594T, 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 is one of 22 agencies being placed in the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS). With its key roles in the nation's ports, waterways, and coastlines, the Coast Guard is an important part of enhanced homeland security efforts. But it also has important nonsecurity missions, such as search and rescue, fisheries and environmental protection, and drug and migrant interdiction. GAO has conducted a number of reviews of the Coast Guard's missions and was asked to testify about the Coast Guard's most recent level of effort for its various missions and the major operational and organizational challenges facing the agency during its transition into the newly created DHS.

What GAO Recommends

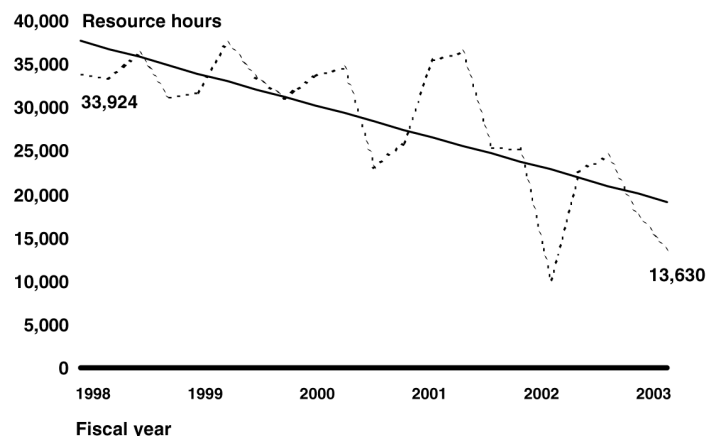
In order to monitor resource use and measure performance, GAO recommended in November 2002 that the Coast Guard develop a long-term blueprint or strategy outlining how resources will be distributed across missions, a time frame for achieving this desired balance, and a useful format for reporting progress to the Congress. The Coast Guard agreed with the need for such a strategy and has started to develop one.

What GAO Found

Data on the most recent levels of effort for the Coast Guard's various missions show clearly the dramatic shifts that have occurred among its missions since the September 11, 2001, attacks. Predictably, levels of effort related to homeland security remain at much higher levels than before September 11th. Other missions, such as search and rescue, have remained at essentially the same levels. In contrast, several other missions—most notably fisheries enforcement and drug interdiction—dropped sharply after September 11th and remain substantially below historical levels. Continued homeland security and military demands make it unlikely that the agency, in the short run, can increase efforts in the missions that have declined. Further, the fiscal year 2004 budget request contains little that would substantially alter the existing levels of effort among missions.

The Coast Guard faces fundamental and daunting challenges during its transition to the new department. Delays in the planned modernization of cutters and other equipment, responsibility for new security-related tasks as directed under the Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA), and mandatory responses to unexpected events, such as terrorist attacks or extended terror alerts, will have an impact on the Coast Guard's ability to meet its new security-related responsibilities while rebuilding its capacity in other missions. Also, as one of the agencies being merged into the new department, the Coast Guard must deal with a myriad of organizational, human capital, acquisition, and technology issues. The enormity of these challenges requires the development of a comprehensive blueprint or strategy that addresses how the Coast Guard should balance and monitor resource use among its various missions in light of its new operating reality.

Number of Resource Hours Spent on Drug Interdiction, by Quarter, October 1997-December 2002.



Source: U.S. Coast Guard and GAO.

Drug interdiction is one of several missions with levels of effort that are substantially below those that existed prior to the September 11th attacks. The dotted line shows actual quarter-by-quarter totals; the thicker line is a regression line showing the general trend.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-594T.

To view the full testimony, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact JayEtta Hecker at (206) 512-2834 or heckerj@gao.gov.