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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-543](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, House Committee on Government Reform

Why GAO Did This Study

Three agencies of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) have primary responsibility for securing the nation’s borders—the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Together, they enforce security across 7,500 miles of land border between the United States and Mexico and Canada, and protect more than 361 seaports and 95,000 miles of coastline. To fulfill their missions, these agencies deploy a variety of valuable air and marine assets.

In this report, GAO analyzed (1) what efforts DHS has undertaken to facilitate coordination of the air and marine assets of the three agencies and (2) how the agencies’ local air and marine units have, in selected areas, coordinated the use of assets and what challenges they faced.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of DHS provide guidance that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of USCG and CBP in their homeland security missions, as well as how asset use should be coordinated, and determine if there are statutory limits on USCG’s ability to coordinate assets with other agencies and whether they should be revised. DHS reviewed a draft of this report and generally concurred with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-543.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Paul Jones at (202) 512-8777 or jonespl@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

Opportunities to Increase Coordination of Air and Marine Assets

What GAO Found

DHS established departmental councils that have identified opportunities to achieve cost savings or cost efficiencies involving the department’s air and marine assets—airplanes, helicopters, and boats. Specifically, the aviation council issued a plan that provides a framework for increasing coordination and collaboration across agencies in the operation and support of aviation assets and resources. For example, the plan identifies opportunities to improve the tracking of aviation assets, develop standardized training programs across agencies, and consolidate maintenance programs and facilities. An additional plan outlines a broad-based approach for effectively employing the department’s aviation assets. The boats council helped CBP take advantage of large-volume discounts to purchase six boats through an existing USCG contract, saving an estimated \$300,000. DHS officials said they are also developing a plan for merging the assets and personnel of the Air and Marine Operations division of ICE with CBP. This effort is intended to enable DHS to maximize the use of its aircraft and pilots and gain potential efficiencies in maintenance, acquisition, and training. DHS expects to finish planning how this effort will be accomplished by September 30, 2005.

The agencies at the four locations GAO visited had undertaken efforts to coordinate assets and related training on an ad hoc basis because of the willingness of local commanders to cooperate with each other. For example, in South Florida, the three agencies jointly developed weekly air and marine schedules for the aircraft and boats they deploy to increase coverage in the area and reduce duplication of patrols. In Bellingham, Washington, USCG provided training to CBP staff, enabling CBP boat operators to supplement USCG crew. Officials at all locations noted that challenges affect the extent to which such coordination can reasonably occur. For example, some assets are not shared because agencies’ needs differ. Headquarter officials also cited potential legal issues that could limit efforts to coordinate the use of assets among agencies, such as prohibition of the diversion of USCG assets to any other organization or entity of DHS. Local unit officials stated that DHS needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the agencies in conducting their homeland security missions to ensure that DHS’s air and marine assets are used in an efficient and coordinated manner that optimizes use of DHS’s resources.

Selected DHS Air and Marine Assets



Source: DHS.