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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-660](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Coast Guard's 110-foot patrol boats are used for a number of missions, such as enforcement of fisheries laws, and the interdiction of migrants and illicit drugs. As part of the Coast Guard's initial plans to replace many of its vessels, it intended to convert its 110-foot patrol boats into 123-foot patrol boats with increased capabilities until the replacement vessel, the Fast Response Cutter (FRC), became operational. However, structural problems on the eight converted 123-foot boats led the Coast Guard to remove these boats from service. Faced with a loss of operational hours, especially in the Coast Guard's Florida-based District 7 where these boats operated, the Coast Guard implemented mitigation strategies to recover lost operational hours.

This report provides information on Coast Guard patrol boat operations and, in particular, addresses: (1) operational challenges created by the removal from service of the 123-foot patrol boats and the Coast Guard's strategies for mitigating their loss; (2) effects these mitigation strategies have had on overall Coast Guard operational hours, as well as operating and maintenance costs, patrol boat crews, and mission performance; and (3) issues that could affect the sustainability of these strategies.

To conduct its work, GAO analyzed data and other documentation on patrol boat operations and mitigation strategies, and interviewed Coast Guard officials.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-660](#). For more information, contact Stephen L. Caldwell at (202) 512-8777 or caldwells@gao.gov.

COAST GUARD

Strategies for Mitigating the Loss of Patrol Boats Are Achieving Results in the Near Term, but They Come at a Cost and Longer Term Sustainability Is Unknown

What GAO Found

The removal from service of eight 123-foot patrol boats in November 2006 created operational challenges by reducing patrol boat operational hours across the Coast Guard and exacerbating an existing gap between the Coast Guard's operational hour target for its fleet of patrol boats and what it was achieving. To mitigate the loss of the District 7-based 123-foot patrol boats and their associated operational hours in fiscal year 2007 and beyond, the Coast Guard implemented a number of strategies. These mitigation strategies include: using the crews from the eight patrol boats removed from service to augment the crews of eight District 7-based patrol boats (i.e., double-crewing); periodically deploying vessels from other districts to perform missions in District 7; increasing the operational hours of 87-foot patrol boats in District 7; and acquiring four new 87-foot patrol boats, among others.

The mitigation strategies have had a number of impacts on Coast Guard operations—both positive and negative. On the positive side, these strategies collectively provided approximately 21,000 additional operational hours to District 7 in fiscal year 2007, and are projected to provide additional operational hours in future years. On the negative side, these strategies have increased operating and maintenance costs; reduced the availability for some on-board crew training; and affected the performance of some missions, such as fisheries enforcement, in districts providing vessel support to District 7.

Several issues, such as greater resource and maintenance needs, can affect the longer-term sustainability of the mitigation strategies. The Coast Guard notes that sustainment of the operational hour gains it achieved through double-crewing patrol boats is dependent, in large part, on continued funding at current levels. Similarly, any operational hour gains it plans to achieve by revising the patrol boat maintenance and upgrade project could be impacted by any reductions in funding. Sustaining the mitigation strategies is also dependent on the Coast Guard's continued ability to delay performing certain missions in some districts to increase mission performance in District 7. Finally, any potential delays in the delivery of the replacement FRC vessel, expected in 2010, will make sustainment more difficult. The Department of Homeland Security, of which the Coast Guard is a component, concurred with our report.

One of the Coast Guard's 110-foot Patrol Boats



Source: Photo courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard.