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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-933T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Finance, and Accountability of the Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Sharing information with nonfederal officials is an important tool in federal efforts to secure the nation's ports against a potential terrorist attack. The Coast Guard has lead responsibility in coordinating maritime information sharing efforts. The Coast Guard has established area maritime security committees—forums that involve federal and nonfederal officials who identify and address risks in a port. The Coast Guard and other agencies have sought to further enhance information sharing and port security operations by establishing interagency operational centers—command centers that tie together the efforts of federal and nonfederal participants.

This testimony is a summary and update to our April 2005 report, *Maritime Security: New Structures Have Improved Information Sharing, but Security Clearance Processing Requires Further Attention*, [GAO-05-394](#). It discusses the impact the committees and interagency operational centers have had on improving information sharing and identifies any barriers that have hindered information sharing.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-933T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Stephen L. Caldwell at (202) 512-9610 or CaldwellS@gao.gov.

MARITIME SECURITY

Information-Sharing Efforts Are Improving

What GAO Found

Area maritime security committees provide a structure that has improved information sharing among port security stakeholders. At the four port locations GAO visited, federal and nonfederal stakeholders said that the newly formed committees were an improvement over previous information-sharing efforts. The types of information shared included assessments of vulnerabilities at port locations and strategies the Coast Guard intends to use in protecting key infrastructure. GAO's ongoing work indicates that these committees continue to be useful forums for information sharing.

Interagency operational centers also allow for even greater information sharing because the centers operate on a 24-hour-a-day basis, and they receive real-time information from data sources such as radars and sensors. The Coast Guard has developed its own centers—called sector command centers—at 35 port locations to monitor information and to support its operations planned for the future. As of today, the relationship between the interagency operational centers and the sector command centers remains to be determined.

In April 2005 the major barrier hindering information sharing was the lack of federal security clearances for nonfederal members of committees or centers. In April 2005, Coast Guard issued guidance to field offices that clarified their role in obtaining clearances for nonfederal members of committees or centers. In addition, the Coast Guard did not have formal procedures that called for the use of data to monitor application trends. As of June 2006, guidance was put in place and according to the Coast Guard, was responsible for an increase in security clearance applications under consideration by the Coast Guard. Specifically, as of June 2006, 188 out of 467 nonfederal members of area maritime security committees with a need to know received some type of security clearance. This is an improvement from February 2005, when no security clearances were issued to 359 nonfederal members of area maritime security committees members with a need to know security information.

Harbor Patrols Coordinated by Interagency Operational Centers



Source: GAO.