



Highlights of [GAO-03-544T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, and Fisheries, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

COAST GUARD

Comprehensive Blueprint Needed to Balance and Monitor Resource Use and Measure Performance For All Missions

Why GAO Did This Study

The September 11th attacks decidedly changed the Coast Guard's priorities and markedly increased its scope of activities. Homeland security, a long-standing but relatively small part of the Coast Guard's duties, took center stage. Still, the Coast Guard remains responsible for many other missions important to the nation's interests, such as helping stem the flow of drugs and illegal migration, protecting important fishing grounds, and responding to marine pollution. For the past several years, the Coast Guard has received substantial increases in its budget to accommodate its increased responsibilities. GAO was asked to review the Coast Guard's most recent level of effort on its various missions and compare them to past levels, analyze the implications of the proposed 2004 budget for these levels of effort, and discuss the challenges the Coast Guard faces in balancing and maximizing the effectiveness of all its missions.

What GAO Recommends

In order to monitor resource use and measure performance, GAO recommended in November, 2002 that the Coast Guard develop a longer-term 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 an effort to develop one.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-544T.

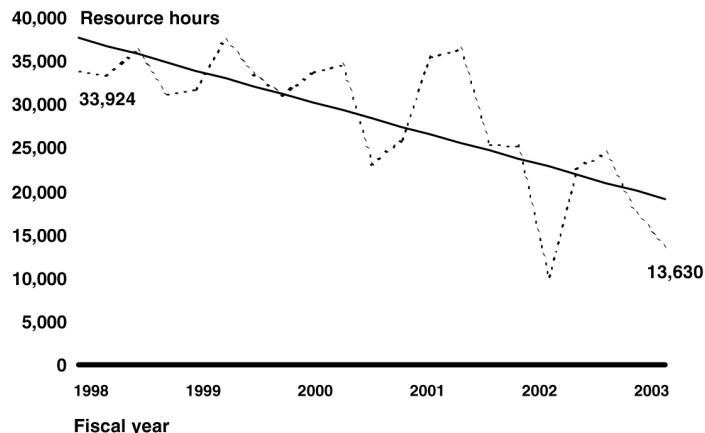
To view the full testimony, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact JayEtta Hecker at (206) 512-2834 or heckerj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

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 11th attacks. Predictably, levels of effort related to homeland security remain at much higher levels than before September 11th. Levels of effort for two major nonsecurity missions—search and rescue and aids to navigational—are now relatively consistent with historical levels. By contrast, several other missions—most notably fisheries enforcement and drug interdiction—dropped sharply after September 11th and remain substantially below historical levels. Although the Coast Guard has stated that its aim is to increase efforts in the missions that have declined, continued homeland security and defense demands make it unlikely that the agency, in the short run, can deliver on this goal. The 2004 budget request contains little that would appear to substantially alter the existing levels of effort among missions. The initiatives in the proposed budget relate mainly to enhancing homeland security and search and rescue missions.

Although the 2004 budget request represents a sizeable increase in funding (9.6 percent), the Coast Guard still faces fundamental challenges in meeting its new security-related responsibilities while rebuilding its capacity to accomplish other missions that have declined. Given the likely constraints on the federal budget in future years, it is important for the Coast Guard to identify the likely level of effort for each of its missions; lay out a plan for achieving these levels; and tie these levels to measurable outputs and goals, so that the agency and the Congress can better decide how limited dollars should be spent.

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



Source: U.S. Coast Guard and GAO.

Note: 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.