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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-448T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, United States Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

More than 3 years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, concerns remain over the security of U.S. seaports and waterways. Seaports and waterways are vulnerable given their size, easy accessibility by water and land, large numbers of potential targets, and close proximity to urban areas. Seaports are also a critical link in the international supply chain, which has its own potential vulnerabilities that terrorists could exploit to transport a weapon of mass destruction to the United States. Federal agencies such as the Coast Guard and Customs and Border Protection and other seaport stakeholders such as state and local law enforcement officials as well as owners and operators of facilities and vessels have taken actions to try to mitigate these vulnerabilities and enhance maritime security.

This testimony, which is based on previously completed GAO work, reports on (1) the types of actions taken by the federal government and other stakeholders to address maritime security, (2) the main challenges that GAO observed in taking these actions, and (3) what tools and approaches may be useful in planning future actions to enhance maritime security.

What GAO Recommends

This testimony makes no recommendations but cites several reports in which recommendations were previously made.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-448T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Margaret Wrightson at (415) 904-2200 or WrightsonM@gao.gov.

MARITIME SECURITY

Enhancements Made, But Implementation and Sustainability Remain Key Challenges

What GAO Found

Federal agencies and local stakeholders have taken many actions to secure seaports. For example, federal agencies have stepped up vessel monitoring, cargo and container inspection, and security patrol activities. Port stakeholders in the private sector and in state and local government have taken such actions as conducting security assessments of infrastructure and vessels and implementing security plans. These actions provide three types of protections: identifying and reducing vulnerabilities of seaports, securing the cargo moving through seaports, and developing an informed view of maritime activities through intelligence, information-sharing, and new technologies to identify and respond to threats.

Due in large part to the urgency with which these actions were implemented, challenges have been encountered in implementing them. While some challenges may be resolved with time, others are more difficult to resolve and could hinder the actions' effectiveness. The main challenges GAO has identified include failure to develop necessary planning components to carry out the programs; difficulty in coordinating the activities of federal agencies and port stakeholders to implement programs; and difficulty in maintaining the financial support to continue implementation of security enhancements.

As intensified homeland security efforts continue, assessing their contribution to security and their sustainability over time will become more important. Assessing the progress made in securing seaports is difficult, as these efforts lack clear goals defining what they are to achieve and measures that track progress toward these goals. As Congress and the nation consider how much security is enough, more attention will likely be needed to define these goals and measures. Doing so is important because no amount of money can totally protect seaports from attack by a determined enemy. These realities suggest that the future focus in applying resources and efforts needs to incorporate an approach to assess critical infrastructure, determine what is most at risk, and apply measures designed to make cost effective use of resources and funding.

Seaports are difficult to secure due to their size, ease of accessibility by water and land, variety of potential targets, and close proximity to urban areas.



Source: Port of Los Angeles.