

GAO  
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-86T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Because the safety and economic security of the United States depend in substantial part on the security of its 361 seaports, the United States has a vital national interest in maritime security.

The Security and Accountability for Every Port Act (SAFE Port Act), modified existing legislation and created and codified new programs related to maritime security. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its U.S. Coast Guard, Transportation Security Agency, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection have key maritime security responsibilities.

This testimony synthesizes the results of GAO's completed work and preliminary observations from GAO's ongoing work pertaining to overall port security, security at individual facilities, and cargo container security.

To perform this work GAO visited domestic and overseas ports; reviewed agency program documents, port security plans, and post-exercise reports; and interviewed officials from the federal, state, local, private, and international sectors.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS to develop strategic plans, better plan the use of its human capital, establish performance measures, and otherwise improve program operations. DHS has generally concurred with our recommendations and is making progress implementing them. We provided a draft of this testimony to DHS agencies and incorporated technical comments as appropriate.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-86T](#). For more information, contact Stephen Caldwell (202) 512-9610 or [caldwells@gao.gov](mailto:caldwells@gao.gov).

## MARITIME SECURITY

### The SAFE Port Act and Efforts to Secure Our Nation's Seaports

#### What GAO Found

Federal agencies have improved overall port security efforts by establishing committees to share information with local port stakeholders, and taking steps to establish interagency operations centers to monitor port activities, conducting operations such as harbor patrols and vessel escorts, writing port-level plans to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks, testing such plans through exercises, and assessing the security at foreign ports. However, these agencies face resource constraints and other challenges trying to meet the SAFE Port Act's requirements to expand these activities. For example, the Coast Guard faces budget constraints in trying to expand its current command centers and include other agencies at the centers.

Similarly, private facilities and federal agencies have taken action to improve the security at approximately 3,000 individual facilities by writing facility-specific security plans, and inspecting facilities to make sure they are complying with their plans, and developing special identification cards for workers to prevent terrorist from getting access to secure areas. Again, federal agencies face challenges trying to meet the act's requirements to expand the scope or speed the implementation of such activities. For example, the Transportation Security Agency missed the act's July 2007 deadline to implement the identification card program at 10 selected ports because of delays in testing equipment and procedures.

Federal programs related to the security of cargo containers have also improved as agencies are enhancing systems to identify high-risk cargo, expanding partnerships with other countries to screen containers before they depart for the United States, and working with international organizations to develop a global framework for container security. Federal agencies face challenges implementing container security aspects of the SAFE Port Act and other legislation. For example, Customs and Border Protection must test and implement a new program to screen 100 percent of all incoming containers overseas—a departure from its existing risk-based programs.

#### Ports contain a wide variety of activities and infrastructure.



Source: United States Coast Guard.