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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-161](#), a report to the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations.

Why GAO Did This Study

For years, the Coast Guard has conducted search and rescue operations from its network of stations along the nation's coasts and waterways. In 2001, reviews of station operations found that station readiness—the ability to execute mission requirements in keeping with standards—was in decline. The Coast Guard began addressing these issues, only to see its efforts complicated by expanded post-September 11, 2001, homeland security responsibilities at many stations. GAO reviewed the impact of changing missions on station needs, the progress made in addressing station readiness needs, and the extent to which plans are in place for addressing any remaining needs.

What GAO Recommends

To assist the Coast Guard in addressing station readiness concerns, GAO recommends that once security requirements have been defined, the Coast Guard

- revise strategic plans to reflect new security responsibilities and to include specific actions and other mechanisms for meeting station needs,
- develop annual station goals, and
- revise practices for funding station personal protection equipment.

The Department of Homeland Security and the Coast Guard reviewed a draft of this report and generally agreed with the findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-161.

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.

COAST GUARD

Station Readiness Improving, but Resource Challenges and Management Concerns Remain

What GAO Found

The Coast Guard does not yet know the extent to which station readiness needs have been affected by post-September 11 changes in mission priorities, although increases in homeland security operations have clearly affected activities and presumably affected readiness needs as well. Following the attacks, stations in and near ports received the bulk of port security duties, creating substantial increases in workloads. The Coast Guard is still in the process of defining long-term activity levels for homeland security and has yet to convert the homeland security mission into specific station readiness requirements. Until it does so, the impact of these new duties on readiness needs cannot be determined. The Coast Guard says it will revise readiness requirements after security activity levels have been finalized.

Increased staffing, more training, new boats, more personal protection equipment (such as life vests), and other changes have helped mitigate many long-standing station readiness concerns. However, stations have been unable to meet current Coast Guard standards and goals in the areas of staffing and boats, an indication that stations are still significantly short of desired readiness levels in these areas. Also, because Coast Guard funding practices for personal protection equipment have not changed, stations may have insufficient funding for such equipment in the future.

The Coast Guard does not have an adequate plan in place for addressing remaining readiness needs. The Coast Guard's strategic plan for these stations has not been updated to reflect increased security responsibilities, and the agency lacks specific planned actions and milestones. Moreover, the Coast Guard has yet to develop measurable annual goals that would allow the agency and others to track stations' progress.

A Coast Guard Boat and a Multimission Station



Source: U.S. Coast Guard.