

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2011, almost 11 million passengers took a cruise from a U.S. port. Media reports about passenger personal safety while aboard cruise vessels—including those related to the January 2012 grounding of the cruise vessel *Costa Concordia* off the coast of Italy, which resulted in 32 deaths—combined with the increasing number of passengers taking cruises has raised questions about passenger safety and security. With the enactment of the CVSSA in 2010, cruise vessels that visit U.S. ports were required to meet certain security and safety requirements, such as having rail heights of at least 42 inches and reporting allegations of certain crimes to the FBI. GAO was asked to review cruise vessel safety as well as security issues—related to keeping passengers safe from crime.

GAO reviewed (1) the extent to which the cruise vessel industry and federal agencies have implemented the CVSSA, and (2) any actions taken following the *Costa Concordia* accident to enhance the safety of cruise vessels visiting U.S. ports.

GAO reviewed the CVSSA and related agency and industry documents, and interviewed officials from the Coast Guard, FBI, CLIA, five cruise lines which accounted for over 80 percent of North American cruise vessel passengers in 2012, and two crime victim advocacy groups. The cruise lines were selected based on several factors including their volume of North American passengers. Crime victim advocacy groups were selected based on their knowledge about cruise ship crime issues. GAO is not making any recommendations in this report.

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CRUISE VESSELS

Most Required Security and Safety Measures Have Been Implemented, but Concerns Remain About Crime Reporting

What GAO Found

The cruise industry and federal agencies have implemented 11 of 15 Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act (CVSSA) provisions, but implementation of 4 provisions requires the development of regulations and policy, and is underway. Officials from all five cruise lines GAO met with said most required measures were in place when the CVSSA was enacted. According to U.S. Coast Guard officials, a notice of proposed rulemaking is in development to address 3 of the 4 remaining provisions. The 3 provisions relate to technologies to (1) detect a person going overboard, (2) maintain a video surveillance system to assist in documenting crimes on the vessel, and (3) transmit communications and warnings from the ship to anyone in surrounding waters. A policy linked to the fourth provision on the certification of trainers who provide the CVSSA course on crime scene preservation to cruise line personnel, is, as of December 2013, undergoing review at the Department of Transportation. With respect to CVSSA crime-reporting requirements, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Coast Guard have implemented these provisions as required. Accordingly, the agencies publish on a website information on reported crimes that are no longer under investigation. However, GAO identified some limitations in the usefulness of the publicly reported data. Specifically, (1) allegations for which investigations are not opened are never published; (2) the data are not timely—due to the length of the criminal justice process—and thus, crime data may be posted months or years after the alleged crime occurred and (3) the data reported are not put into context, such as a city's crime rate, to provide the public with the information needed to compare rates and make decisions. However, some cruise lines are making efforts to improve reported crime data. In August 2013, several cruise lines began voluntarily disclosing alleged crime data on their websites. Also, in July 2013, legislation was introduced to amend the CVSSA that would revise and expand crime-reporting requirements, among other items. As of November 2013, however, these actions were either new or pending. Thus, GAO could not assess whether, or to what extent, the voluntary reporting or potential legislation might provide more useful data than current requirements.

Following the *Costa Concordia* accident, the cruise industry, an international maritime organization, and the Coast Guard took actions to improve passenger safety. The Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA)—which represents over 98 percent of cruise lines in the United States—identified 10 safety-related policies in 2012 that were adopted by all member cruise lines by July 2013. These policies include improvements to vessel passage planning and life jacket stowage, among other things. The International Maritime Organization (IMO)—a United Nations agency responsible for maritime matters—has also adopted a regulation, effective January 2015, requiring passengers to participate in a safety and evacuation exercise (muster drill) prior to or immediately upon departure—rather than within 24 hours of departure. CLIA member cruise lines adopted a similar muster policy weeks after the *Costa Concordia* accident. The Coast Guard is monitoring IMO's consideration of additional regulations. The agency has also started witnessing predeparture muster drills and has reported no major concerns. In addition, the Coast Guard has worked with the cruise industry for several years to plan and hold disaster exercises, including one in April 2013 to practice a mass rescue from a cruise vessel.