

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-226](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Initiations and rites of passage can instill esprit de corps and loyalty and are included in many traditions throughout DOD and the Coast Guard. However, at times these, and more ad hoc activities, have included cruel or abusive behavior that can undermine unit cohesion and operational effectiveness.

Congress included a provision in statute for GAO to report on DOD, including each of the military services, and Coast Guard policies to prevent, and efforts to track, incidents of hazing. This report addresses the extent to which DOD and the Coast Guard, which falls under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), have (1) developed and implemented policies to address incidents of hazing, and (2) visibility over hazing incidents involving servicemembers. GAO reviewed hazing policies; assessed data on hazing incidents and requirements for and methods used to track them; assessed the results of organizational climate surveys that included questions on hazing; conducted focus groups with servicemembers during site visits to two installations selected based on available hazing and sexual assault data, among other factors; and interviewed cognizant officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 12 recommendations, among them that DOD and the Coast Guard regularly monitor policy implementation, issue guidance on the collection and tracking of hazing incident data, and evaluate the prevalence of hazing. DOD and DHS concurred with all of GAO's recommendations and have begun taking actions to address them.

View [GAO-16-226](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov

February 2016

DOD AND COAST GUARD

Actions Needed to Increase Oversight and Management Information on Hazing Incidents Involving Servicemembers

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD), including each of the military services, and the Coast Guard have issued policies to address hazing, but generally do not know the extent to which their policies have been implemented. The military services' and Coast Guard's policies define hazing similarly to DOD and include servicemember training requirements. The military service and Coast Guard policies also contain guidance, such as responsibilities for policy implementation and direction on avoiding hazing in service customs and traditions, beyond what is included in DOD's policy. However, DOD and the Coast Guard generally do not know the extent to which their policies have been implemented because most of the services and the Coast Guard have not conducted oversight through regular monitoring of policy implementation. The Marine Corps conducts inspections of command hazing policy on issues such as providing servicemembers with information on the hazing policy and complying with hazing incident reporting requirements. While these inspections provide Marine Corps headquarters officials with some information they can use to conduct oversight of hazing policy implementation, they do not necessarily cover all aspects of hazing policy implementation. Without routinely monitoring policy implementation, DOD, the Coast Guard, and the military services may not have the accountability needed to help ensure efforts to address hazing are implemented consistently.

DOD and the Coast Guard have limited visibility over hazing incidents involving servicemembers. Specifically, the Army, the Navy, and the Marine Corps track data on reported incidents of hazing, but the data are not complete and consistent due to varying tracking methods that do not always include all reported incidents. For example, until October 2015, the Army only tracked cases investigated by criminal investigators or military police, while the Navy required reports on substantiated hazing cases and the Marine Corps required reports on both substantiated and unsubstantiated cases. The Air Force and Coast Guard do not require the collection of hazing incident data, and instead have taken an ad hoc approach to compiling relevant information to respond to requests for such data. In the absence of guidance on hazing data collection, DOD and the Coast Guard do not have an accurate picture of reported hazing incidents across the services. In addition, DOD and the Coast Guard have not evaluated the prevalence of hazing. An evaluation of prevalence would provide information on the extent of hazing beyond the limited data on reported incidents, and could be estimated based on survey responses, as DOD does in the case of sexual assault. Service officials said that currently, reported hazing incidents are the primary indicator of the extent of hazing. However, data obtained through other sources suggest that hazing may be more widespread in DOD and the Coast Guard than the current reported numbers. For example, GAO analysis of organizational climate survey results from 2014 for the military services and the Coast Guard found that about 12 percent of respondents in the junior enlisted ranks indicated their belief that such incidents occur in their units. Although these results do not measure the prevalence of hazing incidents, they yield insights into servicemember perceptions of hazing, and suggest that an evaluation of the extent of hazing is warranted. Without evaluating the prevalence of hazing within their organizations, DOD and the Coast Guard will be limited in their ability to effectively target their efforts to address hazing.