



Testimony  
Before the Subcommittee on  
Transportation and Maritime Security,  
Committee on Homeland Security,  
House of Representatives

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## MARITIME SECURITY

# Coast Guard and CBP Efforts to Address Prior GAO Recommendations on Asset and Workforce Needs

Statement of Heather MacLeod, Director,  
Homeland Security and Justice

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106695](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Securing the nation's borders against unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs and other contraband, and terrorist activities is a key part of the DHS's mission. With increased attention to overland routes in recent years, such as along the southwest border, criminal organizations use maritime routes to smuggle people, drugs, and weapons into the U.S. Within DHS, the Coast Guard and CBP share responsibility for securing the nation's maritime borders.

This statement discusses: (1) Coast Guard and CBP resources for maritime security and related federal coordination, (2) challenges these agencies have faced managing assets, and (3) related workforce challenges.

This statement is based on GAO's prior work on a variety of asset and workforce issues. For that work, GAO analyzed Coast Guard and CBP documentation and data and interviewed officials. For this statement, GAO also obtained updates on actions DHS has taken to address GAO's recommendations as of March 2023. For a full list of the reports, see [Related GAO Products](#) at the conclusion of this statement.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made 35 recommendations in the reports covered by this statement, including to improve comparability of asset operating costs and workforce assessment processes. As of March 2023, nine of 35 have been implemented, and 26 remain open. GAO continues to monitor the agencies' progress in implementing them.

View [GAO-23-106695](#). For more information, contact Heather MacLeod at (202) 512-8777 or [macleodh@gao.gov](mailto:macleodh@gao.gov).

March 23, 2023

## MARITIME SECURITY

### Coast Guard and CBP Efforts to Address Prior GAO Recommendations on Asset and Workforce Needs

## What GAO Found

The Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) employ assets—including aircraft and vessels—and personnel, to ensure maritime security and safety. Coast Guard and CBP also coordinate with the Department of Defense on the allocation of assets and specialized personnel in their efforts to counter the flow of illicit drugs.

GAO previously identified challenges Coast Guard and CBP face in managing maritime security assets. This includes determining the appropriate allocation of assets across geographic locations and in response to catastrophic events or emergencies, such as hurricanes, oil spills, and humanitarian events. For example, in September 2020, GAO found that the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) ability to assess the costs and benefits of consolidating Coast Guard and CBP operating locations was limited, in part due to the lack of a standard cost measure between the components. GAO recommended DHS develop and implement a way to compare costs. In September 2021, DHS implemented a standardized methodology for costs.

#### Coast Guard Personnel Conducting a Drug Interdiction Operation



Source: U.S. Coast Guard photo. | [GAO-23-106695](#)

The Coast Guard and CBP have taken steps to assess workforce needs. In February 2020, GAO found that the Coast Guard had assessed a small portion of its workforce needs and recommended that Coast Guard update its workforce plan with timeframes and milestones to meet its workforce assessment goals. As of March 2023, the Coast Guard reported that it had revised this plan and submitted it to Congress, as required. GAO is continuing to evaluate the plan. In June 2018, GAO found that CBP faced challenges meeting target hiring and retention levels, such as for law enforcement personnel. CBP implemented an agency-wide exit survey and uses data to inform retention efforts.

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Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our work on maritime security assets and workforce. Securing the nation's borders against unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs and other contraband, and terrorist activities is a key part of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) mission. Within DHS, the Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) use aircraft and vessels to secure U.S. borders, support criminal investigations, and ensure maritime security and safety. The Coast Guard is the principal federal agency charged with ensuring the security and safety of vessels on the high seas and waters subject to U.S. jurisdiction by enforcing laws to prevent death, injury, and property loss. CBP is responsible for securing U.S. borders at and between ports of entry in the air, land, and maritime environments.<sup>1</sup> Coast Guard and CBP share responsibility for patrolling, and enforcing U.S. law along the U.S. maritime borders and territorial sea—maritime approaches 12 nautical miles seaward of the U.S. coast.

The U.S. government has identified illicit drugs, as well as the transnational and domestic criminal organizations that traffic and smuggle them, as significant threats to the public, law enforcement, and the national security of the U.S. With increased attention to overland routes in recent years, such as along the southwest border, criminal organizations smuggling people, drugs, and weapons into the U.S. have adapted their methods to include maritime routes. Further, given challenges the federal government faces in responding to the drug misuse crisis, in March 2021, we added national efforts to prevent, respond to, and recover from drug misuse to our High Risk List. We identified several challenges in the federal government's response to drug misuse, such as the need for

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<sup>1</sup>Ports of entry are facilities that provide for the controlled entry into or departure from the United States. Specifically, a port of entry is any officially designated location (seaport, airport, or land border location) where CBP officers clear passengers, merchandise and other items; collect duties; enforce customs and other U.S. laws; and inspect persons seeking to enter or applying for admission into, or departing the United States pursuant to U.S. immigration and travel controls.

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more effective implementation and monitoring, and related ongoing efforts to address the issue, including law enforcement and drug interdiction.<sup>2</sup>

In 2022, the Coast Guard reported that operating in the dynamic security and maritime domains will become more complicated as it acquires upgraded information systems as well as technologically advanced aircraft and vessels. The Coast Guard reported that these changes require workforce growth and enhanced skills to operate and maintain updated assets.

My statement today discusses (1) Coast Guard and CBP resources for maritime security and related federal coordination, (2) challenges we have identified and recommendations we have made to Coast Guard and CBP related to managing assets, and (3) challenges we have identified and recommendations we have made related to their workforce needs. This statement is based primarily on reports published from June 2018 to March 2023 related to Coast Guard and CBP allocations and acquisitions of aircraft and vessels, and the agencies' efforts to determine their workforce needs. For these products, we analyzed DHS documents and data related to the Coast Guard and CBP and interviewed agency officials. We made 35 recommendations in the reports covered by this statement, including to improve comparability of asset operating costs and workforce assessment processes. As of March 2023, nine of these 35 recommendations have been implemented, and 26 remain open. GAO continues to monitor the agencies' progress in implementing them.

More detailed information on the objectives, scope, and methodology for that work can be found in the issued reports listed in Related GAO Products at the conclusion of this statement. We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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<sup>2</sup>See GAO, *High-Risk Series: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, [GAO-21-119SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2, 2021). GAO's High-Risk Series identifies government operations with vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement, or in need of transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges.

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## Coast Guard and CBP Employ Various Resources to Address Maritime Security in Coordination with DOD

Within DHS, the Coast Guard and CBP employ assets—including aircraft and vessels—and personnel across the U.S. and abroad to secure U.S. borders, support criminal investigations, and ensure maritime security and safety. Their air and marine missions vary depending on operating location. Coast Guard and CBP also coordinate on the deployment and allocation of assets and specialized personnel with the Department of Defense (DOD) to reduce the availability of illicit drugs by countering the flow of such drugs into the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

**Coast Guard resources.** One of the six armed forces, the Coast Guard is a multimission maritime military service within DHS. It is responsible for implementing 11 statutory missions, such as drug interdiction, as well as other concurrent missions (see appendix I). As of September 2020, the Coast Guard operates a fleet of about 200 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, with more than 1,600 boats and about 250 cutters.<sup>4</sup> It employs approximately 55,200 personnel—including active duty, reserve, and civilian.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Coast Guard owns or leases 20,000 facilities, which consist of various types of buildings and structures. For example, within its shore operations asset line, the Coast Guard maintains over 200 stations along U.S. coasts and inland waterways to carry out its search and rescue operations, as well as other missions, such as maritime security (see fig. 1).

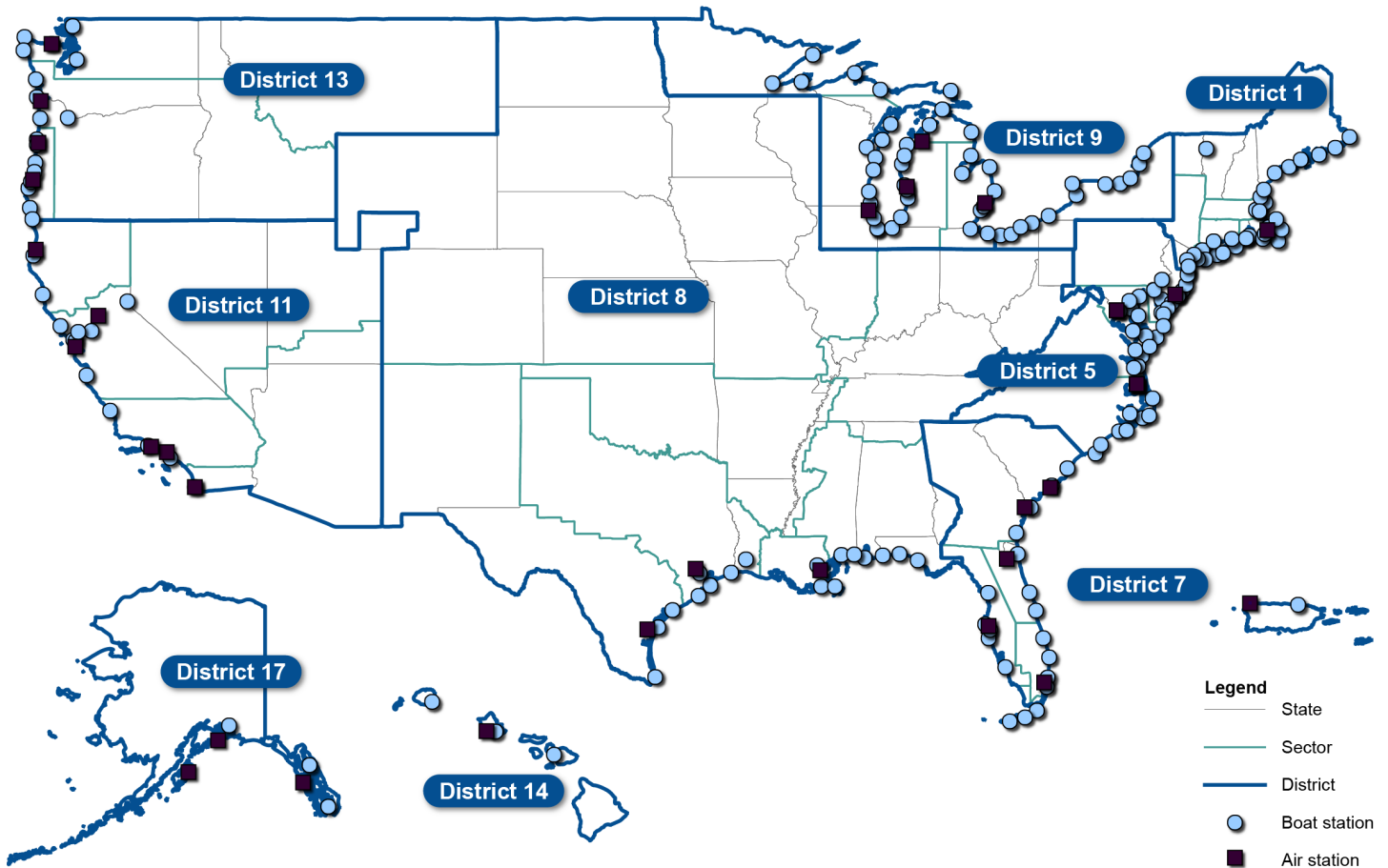
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<sup>3</sup>DOD is the lead federal agency for the detection and monitoring of the aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the U.S., and it operates systems, such as radar, that can be used in support of DHS and other federal, state, and local law enforcement activities.

<sup>4</sup>The Coast Guard classifies vessels under 65 feet in length as boats, which usually operate near shore, on inland waterways, or attached to cutters. Coast Guard also operates cutters, defined as a vessel 65 feet in length or greater with accommodations for a crew to live aboard.

<sup>5</sup>As of April 2022, Coast Guard officials stated that the agency had a total workforce of 55,236—including 46,235 military and 9,001 civilian personnel.

Figure 1: U.S. Coast Guard Air and Marine Operating Locations by District, as of September 2020



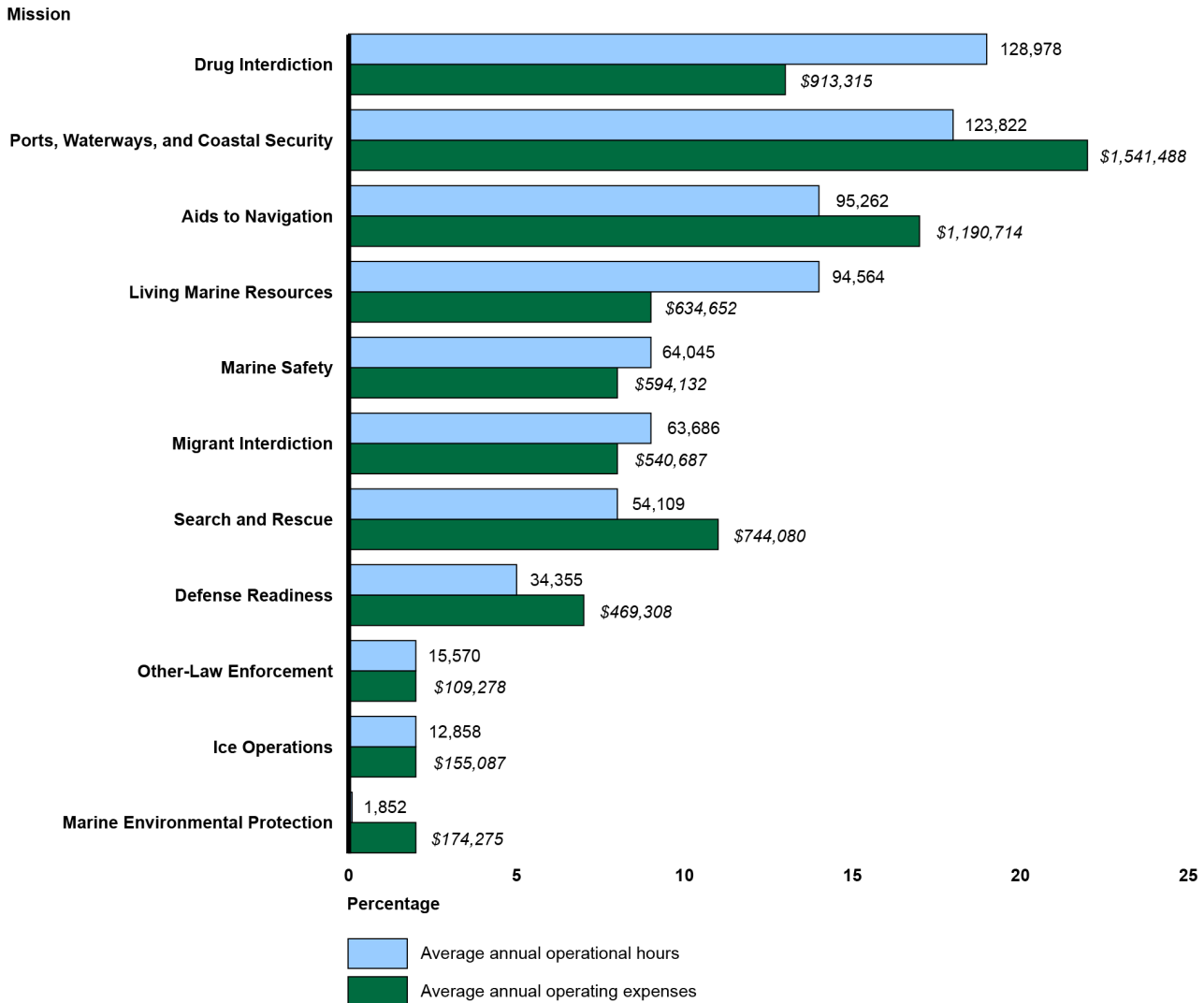
Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security information; U.S. Census Bureau (state boundaries). | GAO-23-106695

Notes: Boat stations shown above also include small boat stations. Air stations shown above also include air facilities. The district numbers are not consecutive because some districts were consolidated to reflect the U.S. Coast Guard’s operational reorganizations since its creation in 1915.

In September 2021, we reported that Coast Guard data show that more than 20 percent of its total estimated operating expenses were for drug interdiction (13 percent) and migrant interdiction (8 percent) for fiscal years 2011 through 2020.<sup>6</sup> Vessel and aircraft deployments for these missions accounted for nearly 30 percent of the average annual operational hours during that period, as shown in figure 2.

<sup>6</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Information on Defense Readiness Mission Deployments, Expenses, and Funding*, GAO-21-104741 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 15, 2021).

**Figure 2: Coast Guard Average Annual Vessel and Aircraft Operational Hours and Estimated Operating Expenses, by Statutory Mission, Fiscal Years 2011 through 2020**



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data. | GAO-23-106695

Note: Operational hours include the use of aircraft, cutters, and boats for the Coast Guard's 11 statutory missions. They do not include the time personnel may spend on missions without using vessels or aircraft. We do not include hours expended for support activities, such as training and technology tests.

**CBP resources.** Within CBP, the Air and Marine Operations and U.S. Border Patrol are the uniformed law enforcement arms responsible for

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securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the air, land, and maritime environments.<sup>7</sup>

In September 2020, we reported that CBP's Air and Marine Operations operates a fleet of over 200 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft and over 100 vessels to secure U.S. borders in the air, maritime, and land domains. The majority of CBP's Air and Marine Operations' activities support its law enforcement mission, including providing surveillance capabilities to detect and support the interdiction of illicit cross-border activity.<sup>8</sup> CBP's Air and Marine Operations develops annual authorized staffing level targets for law enforcement positions based on operational needs and available funding. We previously reported that CBP's Border Patrol staffing goals were based, in part, on its then statutory minimum staffing level for Border Patrol agency positions.<sup>9</sup> CBP's Air and Marine Operations field structure is divided into three regions—northern, southeast, and southwest—and National Air Security Operations throughout the continental United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (see fig. 3).

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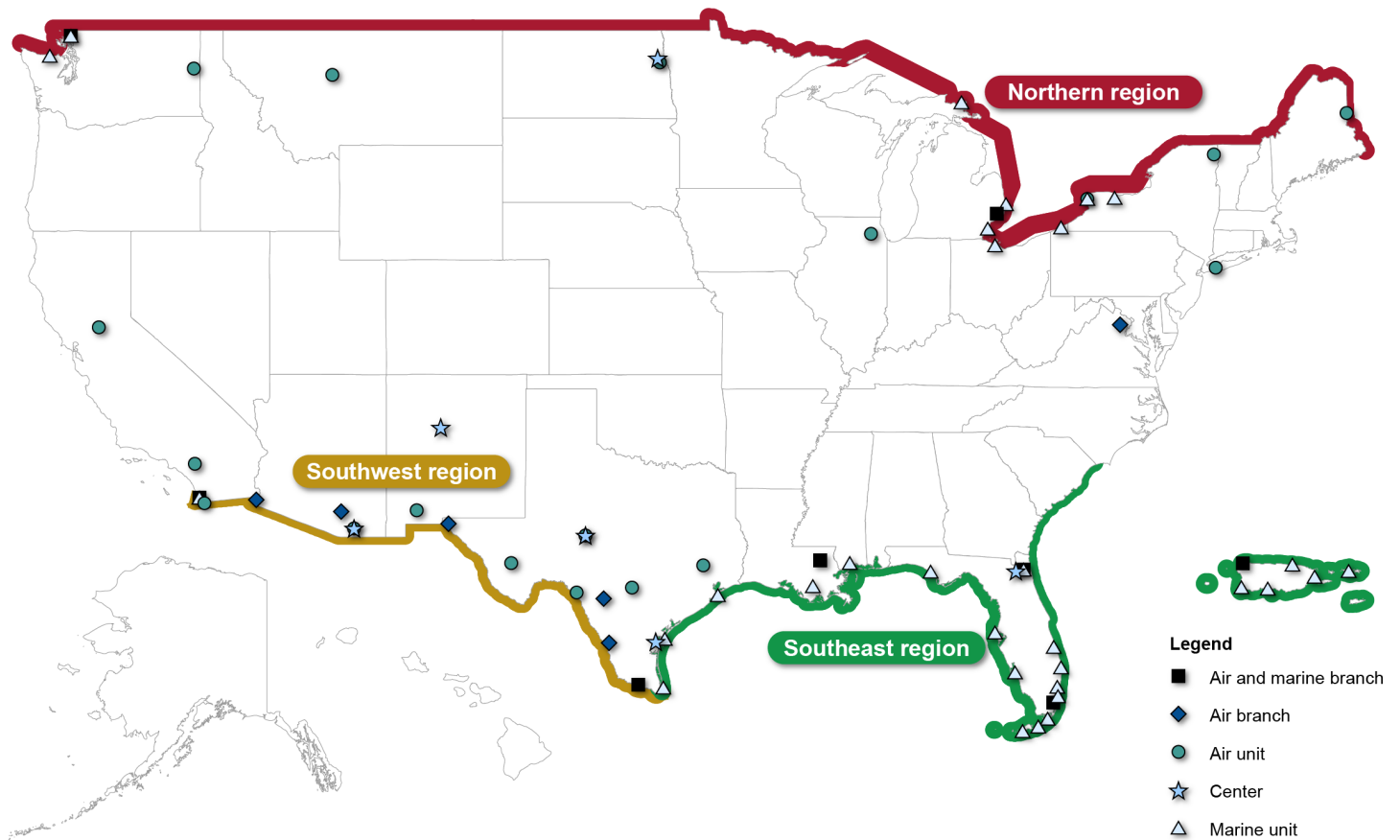
<sup>7</sup>CBP's Office of Field Operations also has border security responsibilities, such as inspecting pedestrians, passengers, and cargo—including international mail and express cargo—at the more than 320 air, land, and sea ports of entry.

<sup>8</sup>GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Assessment of Air and Marine Operating Locations Should Include Comparable Costs across All DHS Marine Operations*, [GAO-20-663](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 24, 2020).

<sup>9</sup>GAO, *U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Progress and Challenges in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Law Enforcement Personnel*, [GAO-18-487](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 27, 2018).



**Figure 3: Air and Marine Operations Air and Marine Operating Locations by Region, as of September 2020**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security information; U.S. Census Bureau (state boundaries). | GAO-23-106695

**DHS and DOD Interagency coordination.** DHS components, including the Coast Guard and CBP, coordinate with DOD on counterdrug missions through the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)-South. In July 2019, we reported on the contribution and allocation of assets, such as ships and surveillance aircraft, through the JIATF-South.<sup>10</sup> Coast Guard, the lead federal agency for maritime drug interdiction, contributes aircraft and vessels to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs smuggled into the U.S. JIATF-South provides maritime and air assets to detect and monitor the

<sup>10</sup>GAO, *Drug Control: Certain DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities*, [GAO-19-441](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 9, 2019).

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trafficking of illicit drugs, such as cocaine, being smuggled north on noncommercial maritime vessels across its area of responsibility.

In November 2019, we reported that the Coast Guard employs specialized units to serve as force multipliers, including for specialized capabilities needed to handle drug interdiction, terrorism, and other threats in the U.S. maritime environment.<sup>11</sup> Among these units, the Coast Guard has two Tactical Law Enforcement Teams which provide specialized capabilities for offshore drug interdiction and vessel interception operations, primarily in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean. These specialized teams do not maintain their own vessels, relying on and deploying via Coast Guard cutters or U.S. Navy or Allied vessels. Figure 4 shows Coast Guard personnel conducting a drug interdiction operation that included a Coast Guard Tactical Law Enforcement member boarding a foreign, semi-submersible vessel, which resulted in seizing 17,000 pounds of cocaine.

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<sup>11</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Assessing Deployable Specialized Forces' Workforce Needs Could Improve Efficiency and Reduce Potential Overlap or Gaps in Capabilities*, [GAO-20-33](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 21, 2019).

**Figure 4: Coast Guard Personnel Conducting Drug Interdiction Operation**



Source: U.S. Coast Guard photo. | GAO-23-106695

## Coast Guard and CBP have Faced Challenges Managing Maritime Security Assets

Our previous reports have identified various challenges the Coast Guard and CBP have faced in managing assets, as well as some steps they have taken to address them. These include assessing the geographic allocation of assets, providing assets to meet critical mission needs, maintaining shore infrastructure, and addressing ongoing acquisition challenges.

**Geographic allocation of assets.** DHS has taken some steps to better identify opportunities to consolidate assets. In September 2020, we reported on DHS assessment activities to support integration and consolidation of cross-component efforts, including opportunities for colocation of Coast Guard and CBP operating locations for air and marine mission activities.<sup>12</sup> We found that DHS’s ability to assess the costs and benefits of consolidating operating locations was limited. Specifically, the agency could not compare costs between Coast Guard and CBP because

<sup>12</sup>[GAO-20-663](#).

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it did not have comparable marine operating cost information and had not developed and implemented a standard cost per float hour methodology.

We recommended DHS develop these tools to help ensure that it has key information to support initiatives to examine integrating and consolidating nearby marine operating locations. DHS concurred with this recommendation. In September 2021, DHS took steps to fully implement our recommendation. Specifically, DHS developed a colocation assessment methodology to assess operating locations based on the types of assets, performance, and cost; and implemented a standard cost per float hour methodology for Coast Guard and CBP vessels.

**Assets to meet critical needs.** The Coast Guard provides assets to meet critical emergent needs, but may not be fully addressing recommended actions based on lessons learned from these activities. In September 2021, we found that from 2017 through 2020 the Coast Guard conducted 23 major surge operations—high-intensity, short-notice efforts to respond to catastrophic events or emergencies, such as hurricanes, oil spills, and humanitarian events.<sup>13</sup> To support these surge operations, the Coast Guard deploys varying levels of aircraft and vessels, as well as personnel, which may require a reallocation of resources to the affected areas while continuing to support and carry out its regular missions. For example, we found that the Coast Guard deployed nearly 1,000 personnel and contributed 495 aircraft and 325 vessel hours to support CBP in response to the February 2019 national emergency declaration at the southwest border from April through November 2019. Following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria in 2017, the Coast Guard deployed over 4,700 personnel and logged about 4,000 aircraft and more than 2,000 vessel hours.

The Coast Guard conducts after-action reviews following these operations, which identify lessons learned and best practices to improve future surge operations. For example, we reported that the Coast Guard's review of its 2014 response to the influx of unaccompanied children/minors at the southwest border found that certain considerations should be taken into account when deploying aircraft long term, such as the availability of ground support and flight crew personnel as well as the security of the aircraft. However, the Coast Guard did not systematically track whether recommended actions were taken. Coast Guard officials

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<sup>13</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: A More Systematic Process to Resolve Recommended Actions Could Enhance Future Surge Operations*, [GAO-21-584](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 21, 2021).

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stated that the lessons learned and related recommended actions help improve future surge operations. We recommended the Coast Guard establish a process for tracking and resolving recommended actions in line with its resolution rate and timeliness goals. DHS and the Coast Guard identified five actions that the Coast Guard would take to do so, including developing a process to identify lead and supporting offices to track and address recommended actions. As of February 2023, the Coast Guard is still in the process of completing these actions.

**Coast Guard shore infrastructure.** The Coast Guard has taken steps to address challenges with its aging and deteriorating shore infrastructure. In February 2019, we reported that the Coast Guard has taken steps to improve how it manages its shore infrastructure, including identifying risks posed by the lack of timely investment and identifying mission-critical facilities.<sup>14</sup> For example, we found that the Coast Guard had documented its process to classify its real property under a tier system—ranging from mission-critical to mission-supportive assets. Using this tier system, the Coast Guard established minimum investment targets to prioritize expenditures on shore infrastructure supporting front-line operations, such as piers or runways.

**Challenges with acquisition of assets.** In March 2023, we reported on our eighth and most recent annual assessment of cost and schedule goals for DHS’s major acquisition programs.<sup>15</sup> We found that the majority of DHS’s major acquisition programs are meeting cost and schedule goals, although the Coast Guard and CBP experienced challenges with acquisition programs that support their law enforcement missions. For example, we found that the Coast Guard continues to face challenges with its Offshore Patrol Cutter and Polar Security Cutter programs, which include providing law enforcement and maritime security capabilities across a range of sea conditions and locations. Despite a program restructure and other efforts, the Offshore Patrol Cutter program still faces significant cost and schedule concerns. For example, the program has

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<sup>14</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard Shore Infrastructure: Applying Leading Practices Could Help Better Manage Project Backlogs of at Least \$2.6 Billion*, [GAO-19-82](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 21, 2019).

<sup>15</sup>GAO, *DHS Annual Assessment: Major Acquisition Programs Are Generally Meeting Goals, but Cybersecurity Policy Needs Clarification*, [GAO-23-105641SU](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 16, 2023). This report provided assessments of Coast Guard and CBP major acquisition programs, but it did not include recommendations specific to these programs. We have ongoing work related to Coast Guard’s acquisition of its Offshore Patrol and Polar Security Cutters.

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determined it will not meet its lead ship delivery date of June 2023. Further, we found that the Polar Security Cutter program does not have enough information from the shipbuilder to determine a new delivery date for its lead ship.

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## Coast Guard and CBP have Experienced Challenges Determining Workforce Needs for Maritime Security

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### Coast Guard Has Conducted Limited Assessments of Workforce Needs

**Limited steps taken to assess workforce needs.** We have previously reported that the Coast Guard had taken some steps to assess its workforce needs, including developing a Manpower Requirements Plan in 2018.<sup>16</sup> However, since 2003, it has assessed only a small portion of its workforce needs through the requirements determination process, which was a key component of its 2018 plan.<sup>17</sup> Specifically, in February 2020, we found that the Coast Guard had completed workforce requirements determinations from calendar years 2003 through 2019 for 6 percent of its workforce.

We also found several limitations affecting the Coast Guard's ability to effectively implement its workforce requirements determination process. Specifically, it lacks time frames for how it will achieve its workforce assessment goals—notably, to assess the workforce requirements for all

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<sup>16</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Increasing Mission Demands Highlight Importance of Assessing Its Workforce Needs*, [GAO-22-106135](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2022); *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Organizational Changes and Determine Workforce Needs*, [GAO-20-223](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 26, 2020).

<sup>17</sup>In April 2018, the Coast Guard reported to Congress that it faced challenges meeting its daily mission demands because it was operating below the workforce level necessary to meet all of its mission requirements. In this report, the Coast Guard set a goal to complete workforce requirements determinations—its preferred tool for assessing needed workforce levels—for all of its units. U.S. Coast Guard, *Manpower Requirements Plan Report to Congress* (Apr. 13, 2018).

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of its positions and units.<sup>18</sup> Among other things, we recommended that the Coast Guard update its Manpower Requirements Plan with timeframes and milestones for doing so.<sup>19</sup> DHS concurred with our recommendations and described actions planned to address them. Among them, the Coast Guard was required to submit this plan to Congress in fiscal year 2022, but did not do so until March 2023. We are in the process of evaluating the plan to determine the extent to which these actions fully address the intent of our recommendation.

**Assessing workforce needs for specialized capabilities.** We have previously reported on Coast Guard's workforce challenges related to identifying capability gaps in specific mission needs, including specialized forces and cybersecurity. In November 2019, we reported that the Coast Guard could benefit from assessing workforce needs for its Deployable Specialized Forces workforce—units of personnel who have a range of specialized capabilities needed to handle drug interdiction, terrorism, and other threats in the U.S. maritime environment.<sup>20</sup> Specifically, we found that the Coast Guard had not used data and evidence to fully assess its Deployable Specialized Forces workforce needs.<sup>21</sup> We reported that conducting this analysis would better position the Coast Guard to identify capability gaps between mission requirements and mission performance caused by deficiencies in the numbers of personnel available.

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<sup>18</sup>The Coast Guard's workforce requirements determination process uses a structured analysis to determine the number and types of personnel needed to effectively perform each mission to a specified standard. The process takes into account the effect of existing, new, or modified requirements on Coast Guard's workforce and is to conclude with a documented determination of the results.

<sup>19</sup>We made a total of six recommendations, four of which addressed limitations with Coast Guard's workforce requirements determination process. The Coast Guard implemented three of these recommendations by updating its guidance, determining necessary personnel to conduct the workforce determination process, and tracking the extent to which it completed this process for its units.

<sup>20</sup>[GAO-20-33](#). We have also previously reported on Coast Guard's challenges related to other specific mission needs, including marine inspection and health care. See GAO, *Coast Guard: Enhancements Needed to Strengthen Marine Inspection Workforce Planning Efforts*, [GAO-22-104465](#), (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 12, 2022); GAO, *Coast Guard Health Care: Improvements Needed for Determining Staffing Needs and Monitoring Access to Care*, [GAO-22-105152](#), (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 4, 2022); and [GAO-22-106135](#).

<sup>21</sup>As of November 2019, the Coast Guard had 25 specialized forces teams and 2 units.



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As a result, we recommended that the Coast Guard conduct a comprehensive analysis of its Deployable Specialized Forces' workforce needs. DHS concurred with this recommendation and, in February 2023, the Coast Guard reported that drafts of the mission analysis reports on two Specialized Forces were being reviewed, with an estimated completion of Spring 2023. However, the Coast Guard informed us that completion of the three remaining Specialized Force unit types is subject to available funding and is not estimated to be completed until September 2023.

In September 2022, we reported on challenges the Coast Guard faces ensuring it has the necessary workforce, given its growing cyber-related mission needs.<sup>22</sup> For example, we found that the Coast Guard had not developed a strategic workforce plan for its cyberspace workforce. We made six recommendations, including that the Coast Guard assess and determine the cyberspace staffing levels needed to meet its cyberspace mission demands and fully implement five recruitment and retention leading practices, such as establishing a strategic workforce plan for its cyberspace workforce. DHS concurred with these recommendations, but the Coast Guard has not yet taken actions to implement them.

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## CBP has Addressed Some Workforce Recruitment and Retention Challenges

We previously reported on challenges CBP has faced in efforts to recruit, hire, and retain law enforcement personnel across its operational components at and between U.S. ports of entry, in the U.S. air and maritime environment, and at certain overseas locations.<sup>23</sup> We reported that in recent years CBP had not attained its then-statutory minimum staffing level for its Border Patrol agent positions or its staffing goals for other law enforcement officer positions. CBP identified high attrition rates in some locations, a protracted hiring process, and competition from other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies as barriers to meeting its staffing goals.

In June 2018, we found that CBP increased its emphasis on recruitment by, among other things, establishing a central recruitment office in 2016; increasing its participation in recruitment events; and hiring a contractor in November 2017 to more effectively target potential applicants and better

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<sup>22</sup>GAO, *Coast Guard: Workforce Planning Actions Needed to Address Growing Cyberspace Mission Demands*, [GAO-22-105208](#), (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2022)

<sup>23</sup>GAO, *U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Progress and Challenges in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Law Enforcement Personnel*, [GAO-19-419T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 7, 2019); and [GAO-18-487](#).



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utilize data. We also found that CBP improved its hiring process as demonstrated by two key metrics—reducing its time-to-hire and increasing the percentage of applicants that are hired. Lastly, we found that CBP enhanced its efforts to address retention challenges but that staffing levels for law enforcement positions consistently remained below target levels.

We recommended that CBP systematically collect and analyze data on departing law enforcement officers and use this information to inform retention efforts. DHS concurred with our recommendation and, as of October 2019, has completed actions to fully implement it. Specifically, CBP implemented an agency-wide exit survey to collect and analyze data on departing law enforcement officers and is using these data to inform its retention efforts.

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Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member Thanedar, and Members of the Subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

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## GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this testimony, please contact Heather MacLeod, Director, Homeland Security and Justice at (202)-512-8777 or [macleodh@gao.gov](mailto:macleodh@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this statement are Hugh Paquette (Assistant Director), Caryn Kuebler (Analyst-in-Charge), Jay Berman, Andrew Curry, Michele Fejfar, Holland Freeman, Eric Hauswirth, Paul Hobart, Dawn Hoff, Sasan J. “Jon” Najmi, Adam Vogt, and Christopher Zubowicz.

# Appendix I: Information on the Coast Guard's 11 Missions

This appendix details the Coast Guard's 11 missions (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Information on the Coast Guard's 11 Missions**

<b>Mission</b>	<b>Description</b>
Aids to Navigation	Mitigate the risk to safe navigation by providing and maintaining more than 51,000 buoys, beacons, lights, and other aids to mark channels and denote hazards.
Defense Readiness	Maintain the training and capability necessary to immediately integrate with Department of Defense forces in both peacetime operations and during times of war.
Drug Interdiction	Stem the flow of illegal drugs into the United States.
Ice Operations	Establish and maintain tracks for critical waterways, assisting and escorting vessels beset or stranded in ice, and remove navigational hazards created by ice in navigable waterways.
Living Marine Resources	Enforce laws governing the conservation, management, and recovery of living marine resources, marine protected species, and national marine sanctuaries and monuments.
Marine Environmental Protection	Enforce laws which deter the introduction of invasive species into the maritime environment, stop unauthorized ocean dumping, and prevent and respond to oil and chemical spills.
Marine Safety	Enforce laws which prevent death, injury, and property loss in the marine environment.
Migrant Interdiction	Stem the flow via maritime routes of unlawful migration and human smuggling activities.
Other Law Enforcement	Enforce international treaties, including the prevention of illegal fishing in international waters and the dumping of plastics and other marine debris.
Ports, Waterways, and Coastal Security	Ensure the security of the waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States and the waterways, ports, and intermodal landside connections that comprise the marine transportation system—and protect those who live or work on the water or who use the maritime environment for recreation.
Search and Rescue	Search for, and provide aid to, people who are in distress or imminent danger.

Source: 6 U.S.C. § 468(a); GAO summary of Coast Guard information. | GAO-23-106695

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# Related GAO Products

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*Coast Guard: Workforce Planning Actions Needed to Address Growing Cyberspace Mission Demands*, [GAO-22-105208](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2022).

*Coast Guard: Increasing Mission Demands Highlight Importance of Assessing Its Workforce Needs*, [GAO-22-106135](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2022).

*Coast Guard Health Care: Improvements Needed for Determining Staffing Needs and Monitoring Access to Care*, [GAO-22-105152](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 4, 2022).

*Coast Guard: Enhancements Needed to Strengthen Marine Inspection Workforce Planning Efforts*, [GAO-22-104465](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 12, 2022).

*Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Better Manage Shore Infrastructure*, [GAO-22-105513](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 16, 2021).

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