



Highlights of [GAO-03-1111](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Search and rescue—one of the Coast Guard’s oldest missions— involves minimizing the loss of life, injury, and property damage by aiding people and boats in distress. The Coast Guard has previously reported that its 30-year-old search and rescue communication system, called the National Distress and Response System, has several deficiencies and is difficult to maintain. Thus, the Coast Guard contracted to replace and modernize it with a new system, called Rescue 21.

GAO was asked to identify the status and plans of the Coast Guard’s acquisition of Rescue 21 and the technical and program risks associated with Rescue 21.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, in part, that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard to establish a new schedule for critical testing phases and initial operating capability and ensure that milestones are established for completing test plans for formal qualification testing, system integration testing, and operational testing and evaluation.

In commenting on a draft of our report, Coast Guard officials generally agreed with GAO’s findings and recommendations and provided technical corrections, which were incorporated as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1111.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

COAST GUARD

New Communication System to Support Search and Rescue Faces Challenges

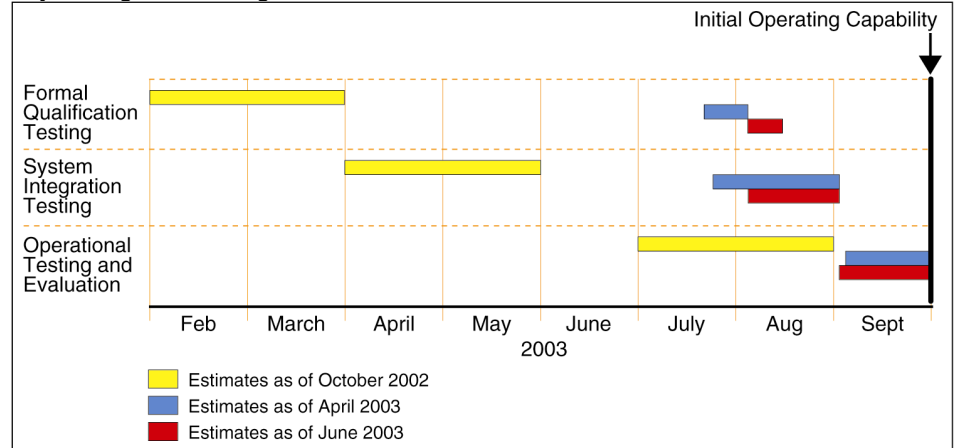
What GAO Found

Rescue 21’s original schedule, which called for it to achieve initial operating capability by September 2003, has been postponed, and the Coast Guard has not yet finalized a new schedule. This postponement was due in part to the development of the system taking longer than planned.

GAO reviewed the Coast Guard’s management of three risk areas associated with Rescue 21:

- *Test management.* Scheduled completion dates for key tests are still being determined. These key tests (formal qualification testing, system integration testing, and operational testing and evaluation) are incremental tests that the Coast Guard is planning to perform before reaching initial operating capability. Completion dates are not yet set because the Coast Guard decided to postpone initial operating capability due to delays in the original test schedule, which resulted in increased risks associated with compressing and overlapping key tests (see figure). In addition, key deliverables, including test plans, are still outstanding, and no scheduled completion dates exist.
- *Requirements management.* The Coast Guard has a process in place for managing system requirements.
- *Risk management.* The Coast Guard has a program in place for identifying, prioritizing, and minimizing risks. Two high risks identified by the Coast Guard are software development and environmental concerns related to the construction of new antenna sites, which may delay the implementation of Rescue 21.

Key Testing Dates through June 2003



Source: Coast Guard data, GAO analysis.