



Highlights of [GAO-12-1009T](#), a testimony for the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Ports, waterways, and vessels handle billions of dollars in cargo annually and an attack on this maritime transportation system could impact the global economy. November 2012 marks the 10-year anniversary of MTSA, which required a wide range of security improvements. DHS is the lead federal department responsible for implementing MTSA and it relies on its component agencies, such as the Coast Guard and CBP, to help implement the act. The Coast Guard is responsible for U.S. maritime security interests and CBP is responsible for screening arriving vessel crew and cargo. This testimony summarizes GAO's work on implementation of MTSA requirements over the last decade and addresses (1) progress the federal government has made in improving maritime security and (2) key challenges that DHS and its component agencies have encountered in implementing maritime security-related programs. GAO was unable to identify all related federal spending, but estimated funding for certain programs. For example, from 2004 through May 2012 CBP obligated over \$390 million to fund its program to partner with companies to review the security of their supply chains. This statement is based on GAO products issued from August 2002 through July 2012, as well as updates on the status of recommendations made and budget data obtained in August 2012.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS in prior reports and testimonies to strengthen its maritime security programs. DHS generally concurred and has implemented or is in the process of implementing them.

View [GAO-12-1009T](#). For more information, contact Stephen L. Caldwell at (202) 512-9610 or [caldwells@gao.gov](mailto:caldwells@gao.gov).

## MARITIME SECURITY

### Progress and Challenges 10 Years After the Maritime Transportation Security Act

#### What GAO Found

GAO's work has shown that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), through its component agencies, particularly the Coast Guard and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), have made substantial progress in implementing various programs that, collectively, have improved maritime security. In general, GAO's work on maritime security programs falls under four areas: (1) security planning, (2) port facility and vessel security, (3) maritime domain awareness and information sharing, and (4) international supply chain security. DHS has, among other things, developed various maritime security programs and strategies and has implemented and exercised security plans. For example, the Coast Guard has developed Area Maritime Security Plans around the country to identify and coordinate Coast Guard procedures related to prevention, protection, and security response at domestic ports. In addition, to enhance the security of U.S. ports, the Coast Guard has implemented programs to conduct annual inspections of port facilities. To enhance the security of vessels, both CBP and the Coast Guard receive and screen advance information on commercial vessels and their crews before they arrive at U.S. ports and prepare risk assessments based on this information. Further, DHS and its component agencies have increased maritime domain awareness and have taken steps to better share information by improving risk management and implementing a vessel tracking system, among other things. For example, in July 2011, CBP developed the Small Vessel Reporting System to better track small boats arriving from foreign locations and deployed this system to eight field locations. DHS and its component agencies have also taken actions to improve international supply chain security, including developing new technologies to detect contraband, implementing programs to inspect U.S.-bound cargo at foreign ports, and establishing partnerships with the trade industry community and foreign governments.

Although DHS and its components have made substantial progress, they have encountered challenges in implementing initiatives and programs to enhance maritime security since the enactment of the Maritime Security Transportation Act (MTSA) in 2002 in the areas of: (1) program management and implementation; (2) partnerships and collaboration; (3) resources, funding, and sustainability; and (4) performance measures. For example, CBP designed and implemented an initiative that placed CBP staff at foreign seaports to work with host nation customs officials to identify high-risk, U.S.-bound container cargo, but CBP initially did not have a strategic or workforce plan to guide its efforts. Further, the Coast Guard faced collaboration challenges when developing and implementing its information management system for enhancing information sharing with key federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies because it did not systematically solicit input from these stakeholders. Budget and funding decisions have also affected the implementation of maritime security programs. For example, Coast Guard data indicate that some of its units are not able to meet self-imposed standards related to certain security activities—including boarding and escorting vessels. In addition, DHS has experienced challenges in developing effective performance measures for assessing the progress of its maritime security programs. For example, the Coast Guard developed a performance measure to assess its performance in reducing maritime risk, but has faced challenges using this measure to inform decisions.