Highlights of GAO-25-107025, a report to congressional committees

COAST GUARD

Additional Actions Needed to Guide Training and Assessment Efforts

Why GAO Did This Study

In recent years, the Coast Guard has increasingly focused on emerging mission demands such as Arctic operations and cybersecurity. Meeting these mission demands requires enhanced skills and training for the Coast Guard workforce. Within the Coast Guard, FORCECOM is responsible for developing training for Coast Guard programs to meet these and other demands, and for assessing units' compliance with policies and procedures.

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 includes a provision for GAO to review FORCECOM's efforts to train and assess the Coast Guard workforce.

This report examines 1) the extent that FORCECOM has addressed leading practices in its training efforts; 2) how FORCECOM has updated training to meet certain emerging mission demands; and 3) the extent that FORCECOM has assessed Coast Guard units' compliance with policy.

GAO analyzed Coast Guard documentation and data on FORCECOM's training and assessment activities. GAO also interviewed Coast Guard officials, including officials at several training centers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FORCECOM (1) ensure the accuracy of certain training data, (2) assess its guidelines on course evaluations, and (3) develop a project plan to develop and implement its data dashboard. The Department of Homeland Security concurred with these recommendations.

View GAO-25-107025. For more information, contact Heather MacLeod at (202) 512-8777 or macleodh@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Force Readiness Command (FORCECOM) is responsible for a wide range of Coast Guard training programs. FORCECOM uses an established model for developing, implementing, and evaluating its training. GAO found that FORCECOM generally addressed five of seven leading practices for federal training efforts. However, FORCECOM did not fully address the remaining two: to ensure that 1) measures of effectiveness are included in training and 2) training is evaluated. Specifically, FORCECOM develops learning objectives for each course describing knowledge and skills to apply on the job. Training centers are to review these learning objectives to keep up with changing conditions, but FORCECOM does not have accurate data on the date when a course was last reviewed. For example, 63 percent of course review dates for fiscal year 2023 that GAO reviewed were blank. FORCECOM also has outdated guidance for evaluating the long-term effectiveness of its training programs. Fully addressing these two leading practices will help FORCECOM's efforts to ensure its training is effectively preparing the Coast Guard workforce to meet mission demands.

Training Boat and Vessel Fire Simulator at a Coast Guard Training Center

Source: GAO photos. | GAO-25-107025

FORCECOM has taken steps to update training for emerging mission demands, such as cybersecurity, and modernize its training efforts. When program offices identify a need for training, FORCECOM works with them to develop solutions. For example, FORCECOM has developed online cybersecurity trainings to address a knowledge gap among the Coast Guard's marine inspectors. FORCECOM has also taken steps to modernize its training enterprise—for example, by expanding the use of virtual reality in certain trainings.

FORCECOM has a long-standing assessment program to evaluate Coast Guard units' compliance with policies and procedures. FORCECOM is updating the program to gain more transparency into each unit's compliance status. For example, FORCECOM has created a data dashboard to centralize all the assessment program data. However, FORCECOM does not have a detailed, written project plan for fully developing and implementing the dashboard. Creating a plan to develop and implement the data dashboard would help guide FORCECOM's efforts to increase assessment program compliance.

United States Government Accountability Office