



# Improving Precommissioning Assignments and Readiness on the U.S. Coast Guard Offshore Patrol Cutter

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# Offshore Patrol Cutter



- DHS level 1 major acquisition program
  - Construction of up to 25 ships
  - First ship to be delivered in 2023
- Precommissioning (PRECOM) period expected to last 3 years
  - 12 months pre-delivery activities
  - 20-24 months post-delivery activities
- USCG concerns
  - PRECOM assignments are not desirable
  - Current schedules result in a loss of institutional knowledge

# Research approach



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## Analysis was based on

- Review of relevant documents and literature
- Discussions with subject-matter experts
- Analysis of personnel data

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We developed 10 courses of action (COAs), in addition to the status quo, to mitigate problems associated with PRECOM assignments

	Specified by USCG	Developed by RAND
<b>Status Quo</b>		
1. Current precommissioning process	✓	
<b>COAs That Delay Crew Reporting</b>		
2. Expanded Preliminary Crew Assembly Facility (PCAF)	✓	
3. PCAF expanded further to training and homeport transit		✓
4. Contracted mariner (CONMAR) crew	✓	
5. Cutter delivered to homeport		✓
6. Crew reports in more than two phases		✓
<b>COAs That Develop Institutional Knowledge</b>		
7. Operational centers of excellence (hub and spoke model)	✓	
8. Voluntary tour extensions		✓
9. Phased crewing across OPC hulls		✓
<b>COAs That Offer Incentive Pays</b>		
10. Targeted incentive pays		✓
11. Bidding for assignment incentive pay		✓

# COAs that delay crew reporting

**COA 2:** Expanded Preliminary Crew Assembly Facility (PCAF)

**COA 3:** PCAF expanded further to training and homeport transit

**COA 4:** Contracted mariner crew

**COA 5:** Cutter delivered to homeport

**COA 6:** Crew reports in more than two phases

- Engage commissioning crew only as required
- Require reorganization of PRECOM activities and reassignment to other parties
- Crew spends fewer days in port performing post-delivery installations and tests and more days underway on operational patrols
- Implementation considerations
  - additional funding
  - various contract negotiations
  - crew scheduling

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# COAs that develop institutional knowledge

**COA 7:** Operational centers of excellence (hub and spoke model)

**COA 8:** Voluntary tour extensions

**COA 9:** Phased crewing across OPC hulls

- Focus on developing expertise, sharing best practices, and promoting standardization across the OPC fleet
- Knowledge transfer may occur across multiple hulls or within a single hull
- Implementation considerations
  - infrastructure investment
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# COAs that offer incentive pays

**COA 10:** Targeted incentive pays

**COA 11:** Bidding for assignment incentive pay

- Preserve current PRECOM process and schedule
- Adjust personnel assignment and compensation to
  - select crew members who find PRECOM assignment most desirable
  - compensate them for residual dissatisfaction
- Implementation considerations
  - funding
  - administration and management
  - investment in bidding system (COA 11)

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# We analyzed each COA using five evaluation criteria



Crew satisfaction



Crew preparation and  
knowledge retention



Timeliness



Feasibility  
(ease of implementation)



Cost

Coast Guard  
objectives and other  
desired outcomes

Challenges or  
barriers to  
implementation

# We used the evaluation criteria to identify the strongest COAs within group

## Delayed crew reporting

- COA 2: Expanded PCAF
- COA 3: Further expanded PCAF for training and home port transit
- COA 4: Contracted mariner crew
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- COA 6: More than two crew reporting phases

## Developing institutional knowledge

- COA 7: Operational centers of excellence
- COA 8: Voluntary tour extensions
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## Incentive pays

- COA 10: Targeted incentive pays
- COA 11: Bidding for assignment incentive pay

### Strongest among the COAs that delay crew reporting

- Crew satisfaction: COAs 2 and 3
- Knowledge retention: COAs 2 and 3
- Timeliness: COA 5
- Feasibility: COA 6
- Cost: COA 6

### Strongest among the COAs that develop institutional knowledge

- Crew satisfaction: COA 9
- Knowledge retention: COA 9
- Timeliness: N/A
- Feasibility: COA 8
- Cost: COA 8

### Strongest among the COAs that offer incentive pays

- Crew satisfaction: COA 11
- Knowledge retention: N/A
- Timeliness: N/A
- Feasibility: COA 10
- Cost: Unknown

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# Implementation considerations

- The best way to combine the COAs depends on how the USCG prioritizes the evaluation criteria
  - Many COAs present a trade-off between (1) improvements in crew satisfaction and knowledge transfer and (2) ease of implementation and affordability
- An incremental approach is one path forward
  - Implement more feasible COAs in the short term
  - Work toward higher impact COAs over the long term
- Prioritizing COAs that target the officer population would address the more acute issues
- Attending to larger personnel management and acquisition issues would improve satisfaction with PRECOM assignments specifically
  - Dissatisfaction with sea duty aboard major cutters
  - Heavy in-port workloads
  - Lack of transparency in personnel management and practices



Full report available at

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1617-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1617-1.html)

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