



Weapons Training Requirements

Report to Congress
November 20, 2024



U.S. Coast Guard

Foreword

November 20, 2024

I am pleased to present the following report, “Weapons Training Requirements,” prepared by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 directs the submission of a report on the findings of a study of weapons training requirements for Coast Guard personnel.

Pursuant to Congressional requirements, this report is provided to the following members of Congress:

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Should you require additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact my Senate Liaison Office at (202) 224-2913 or House Liaison Office at (202) 225-4775.

Sincerely,



Linda L. Fagan
Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard
Commandant





Weapons Training Requirements

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I. Legislative Language

This report responds to the language set forth in Section 11254 of the Don Young Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2022 (Pub. L. No. 117-263), which reads:

SEC. 11254. STUDY ON FREQUENCY OF WEAPONS TRAINING FOR COAST GUARD PERSONNEL.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Commandant shall conduct a study to assess whether current weapons training required for Coast Guard law enforcement and other relevant personnel is sufficient.

(b) **ELEMENTS.**—The study required under subsection (a) shall—

(1) assess whether there is a need to improve weapons training for Coast Guard law enforcement and other relevant personnel; and

(2) identify—

(A) the frequency of such training most likely to ensure adequate weapons training, proficiency, and safety among such personnel;

(B) Coast Guard law enforcement and other applicable personnel who should be prioritized to receive such improved training; and

(C) any challenge posed by a transition to improving such training and offering such training more frequently, and the resources necessary to address such a challenge.

(c) **REPORT.**—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Commandant shall submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives a report on the findings of the study conducted under subsection (a).

II. Report

The Coast Guard is an armed service that conducts both military and federal law enforcement missions. Mission success depends on a standardized, reliable, and effective firearms training program. The Coast Guard's last formal small arms study, the Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA), was completed in December 2014.¹ Building on the SNA findings, the study was followed by the convening of a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Joint Weapons Training Working Group (2019-2021). The following actions resulted from these efforts:

1. The Firearms Training Program was reviewed over a two-year period as part of the Coast Guard Operations Human Performance Advisory Council (OHPAC) initiative. The review was initiated by the OHPAC Specialized Capabilities Sub-Council with the goal of increasing firearms proficiency while also decreasing the number of negligent firearm discharges in the Coast Guard. The Sub-Council defined "firearms proficiency" to establish a base for the new firearms training program. The Sub-Council directed a Force Readiness Command – Training, Performance Technology Center SNA to ensure that the Coast Guard is providing the correct training to individuals carrying firearms and that instructors are using the correct training methods.
2. Concurrent with the SNA, the Specialized Capabilities Sub-Council chartered a team of multiple entities, including the Office of Specialized Capabilities, Office of Maritime Law Enforcement, Coast Guard Investigative Service, the Gunners Mate Rating Force Master Chief, and the senior firearms instructor at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers. The team was charged with developing a baseline structure for the Coast Guard firearms training program. To ensure a manageable approach, the team concentrated on pistol training. The team developed a four-phase training program consisting of Pre-Range Training, Pre-Qualification Training, a new Pistol Qualification Course of Fire, and Post-Range Training.
3. The Coast Guard implemented a multi-phase firearms training and evaluation program, Firearms Training and Evaluation, Pistol (FTE-P) Phase I-IV. Phase I is classroom instruction (non-live fire). Phase II consists of non-live fire range drills and 150 rounds of live fire drills. Phase III consists of a 50 round live fire range examination (qualification). Phase IV complements the first three phases and utilizes an airsoft pellet pistol as a training tool to simulate the current Coast Guard pistol using live-action role players. The scenario-based training combines pistol handling skills and use-of-force judgement in a single exercise. All participants must complete FTE-P Phases I-III prior to completing Phase IV.
4. The DHS Joint Weapons Training Working Group (2019-2021) led to the creation of the Glock-based DHS Pistol Qualification Course (PQC) now adopted by the Coast Guard. The PQC is modeled after the Coast Guard's FTE-P Phase I-IV training with several changes to increase weapons proficiency and enhance law enforcement officer survivability. The PQC includes proficiency and qualification training for the Coast Guard's primary law enforcement weapon, the Glock G19 9mm service pistol. The fleet-wide transition from the Sig Sauer P229 to the Glock G19 began on January 1, 2024. The

¹ Strategic Needs Assessment Report, Dec 2014

combination of the new pistol and 9mm ammunition resulted in a more efficient and effective primary law enforcement weapon system, producing initial qualification rates of 96 percent.

5. The Coast Guard has determined the semiannual frequency of FTE-P Phases I-IV meets proficiency requirements. With the implementation of the PQC, the Coast Guard did not identify a need to increase the frequency of separate training events. By modernizing the weapons training program, the Coast Guard increased the number of hours required for weapons training, while maintaining the same frequency of range training. However, Coast Guard law enforcement units are also allowed to conduct additional proficiency training as operational tempo allows.

The Coast Guard is currently meeting weapons training requirements; however, the availability of Small Arms Firing Ranges (SAFRs) creates challenges across the Service, as described below:

1. Non-Military SAFRs: Local ranges often require reservations six months to one year in advance, and often do not meet the range requirements for Coast Guard weapons qualification. Range fees average \$4,000 - \$5,000 per evolution, per unit, every six months. These costs often increase for weekend use when reserve members are drilling at their units and must receive range training.
2. Department of Defense (DoD) SAFRs: DoD ranges can be challenging to schedule, as precedence may be given to DoD units over other agencies at some SAFRs due to competing priorities, such as for pre-deployment training and for military readiness, and the Coast Guard must often rely on short notice cancellations for range access.. The Coast Guard operates in a dynamic operational tempo; reserving range dates six months to one year out often results in cancelling or rescheduling due to operational or other demands.
3. Coast Guard SAFRs: There are currently 15 owned and operated by the Coast Guard and designed under the guidance of an Air Force Engineering Technical Letter. Four are currently not mission capable (NMC) and two are partially mission capable (PMC). It often takes units a minimum of two days to qualify all personnel as a result of the SAFR's condition or maintenance status. The condition and shortage of Coast Guard owned SAFRs further limits the Coast Guard's ability to expand small arms training.

While the Coast Guard continues to meet small arms qualification requirements, the Service needs to continue to invest in existing SAFRs and seek innovative ways to expand SAFR access. The Coast Guard must continue to maintain its current SAFRs and conduct the planning necessary to inform investments and ensure SAFRs are fully mission capable for training. Additionally, the Service must increase SAFR access and capacity. One solution could involve modular firing ranges (MFRs). Purchase and deployment of MFRs aligns with DHS strategic sourcing by creating a "shared" capability for DHS components. DHS established a GSA contract for MFRs which could be leveraged to support the collective initiative. MFRs have an average construction cost of 60 percent of traditional SAFRs. They are more cost effective and easier to maintain and can provide more flexibility for all agencies under the DHS umbrella.

III. Conclusion

The Coast Guard must maintain weapons proficiency for all members serving in a law enforcement or military combatant capacity. The FTE-P Phases I-IV has vastly improved the Service's small arms proficiency by changing to a lighter service weapon with reduced recoil pulse and increasing the number of rounds fired, without increasing the frequency of training evolutions; as doing so would not be feasible for operational units.

However, shortfalls in SAFR availability and access hinder the Coast Guard's ability to increase the opportunity for armed units to conduct additional weapons proficiency training. Investing in existing Coast Guard SAFRs and/or new MFRs could address these shortfalls.

Appendix: Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definition
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DoD	Department of Defense
FTE-P	Firearms Training and Evaluation - Pistol
MFR	Modular Firing Range
mm	Millimeter
OHPAC	Operations Human Performance Advisory Council
PQC	Pistol Qualification Course
SAFR	Small Arms Firing Range