

Coast Guard Member

Search and rescue, law enforcement and pollution response on American waters. You can enlist straight out of high school.

TYPICAL PAY

\$52,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$85k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Cutters at sea, small boat stations, air stations, shore units

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
 A diploma is the standard. Swimming ability and fitness matter more here than in most services.
- 2 Talk to a recruiter and test** Weeks to months
 You take the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), the military entrance test, plus a medical exam and a background check. Your score decides which jobs are open to you.
- 3 Basic training** 8 weeks
 Eight weeks at the recruit training center in Cape May, New Jersey. Physical training, seamanship, firefighting, weapons and water survival.
- 4 Your first unit, then job school** Months to a year
 Many recruits go to a cutter or a small boat station first, then to the school for their rating, which is what the Coast Guard calls a job specialty.
- 5 Qualify, advance, re-enlist or leave** 4 years per contract
 You advance by time served, exams and performance. A first enlistment is usually four years.

Pros and cons

- + Paid from day one with no tuition and no debt
- + Education benefit that can cover a full degree afterwards
- + Real responsibility at 19 that no civilian job hands you
- You sign a multi-year contract you cannot simply quit
- The service decides where you live, and it moves you
- Long deployments and watch schedules that wreck sleep

Good to know

It is the only armed service outside the Defense Department

The Coast Guard sits under the Department of Homeland Security in peacetime, and can be transferred to the Navy in wartime. It is the smallest of the armed services, with roughly 40,000 active duty me...

It is a law enforcement agency as well as a military one

Coast Guard members can stop, board and arrest on American waters, which no other armed service can do routinely. Drug and migrant interdiction is a daily part of the mission.

Optional boosts

Aviation maintenance technician. Machinery technician. Health services technician. Maritime enforcement specialist.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET: Military Enlisted Tactical Operations and Crew Members, All Other (55-3019.00)

Go Coast Guard: official recruiting site

Go Coast Guard: eligibility requirements

Department of Veterans Affairs: Post-9/11 GI Bill

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/coast-guard-member>



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