U.S. COAST GUARD / HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Five services. One Coast Guard.

1789–2003 • Predecessor services and departmental transfers

Treasury · Commerce and Labor · Commerce · Navy / USN · Transportation · Homeland Security

	AGENCY / EVENT	DEPARTMENT / TRANSFER
1789	**Lighthouse Service** Federal lighthouse administration begins. Later moves to Commerce; joins the Coast Guard in 1939.	Treasury
1790 4 AUG	**Revenue Cutter Service** Revenue cutters authorized for customs enforcement. Predecessor of the Coast Guard's maritime law-enforcement mission.	Treasury
1848	**Life-Saving Service: early beginnings** Federal funding establishes lifesaving stations. Treasury oversees the developing station system.	Treasury
1852	**Steamboat Inspection Service** Established to inspect steam vessels and improve safety. Remains in Treasury until 1903.	Treasury
1878 18 JUN	**Life-Saving Service: formal organization** Organized as a separate Treasury service. Builds on the early station system and its 1871 reorganization.	Treasury
1884 5 JUL	**Bureau of Navigation** Established to administer navigation laws and merchant-vessel matters.	Treasury
1903 14 FEB	**Three agencies change departments** Lighthouse administration, Steamboat Inspection Service, and Bureau of Navigation transfer together.	Treasury → Commerce and Labor
1913 4 MAR	**Commerce and Labor separates** The same three agencies remain with Commerce when the two departments separate.	Commerce and Labor → Commerce
1915 28 JAN	**U.S. Coast Guard established** Revenue Cutter Service + Life-Saving Service merge. The new service operates within Treasury.	Treasury
1917 6 APR	**First transfer to the U.S. Navy** Coast Guard operates as a service in the Navy during World War I.	Treasury → Navy / USN
1919 28 AUG	**Coast Guard returns to Treasury** The first period of Navy control ends. Peacetime administration returns to Treasury.	Navy / USN → Treasury
1932	**Navigation + steamboat inspection merge** Bureau of Navigation and Steamboat Inspection is created. The combined bureau remains within Commerce.	Commerce
1936 27 MAY	**Combined bureau renamed** Becomes the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation. Continues within Commerce.	Commerce
1939 1 JUL	**Lighthouse Service joins the Coast Guard** Lighthouse functions transfer to the Coast Guard. Coast Guard is administered by Treasury at this time.	Commerce → Treasury
1941 1 NOV	**Second transfer to the U.S. Navy** Coast Guard operates as a service in the Navy during World War II, before U.S. entry into the war.	Treasury → Navy / USN
1942 1 MAR	**Wartime transfer of marine-safety functions** Vessel inspection, navigation, and merchant-seamen functions transfer to the Coast Guard, then under Navy control.	Commerce → Navy / USN
1946 1 JAN	**Coast Guard returns to Treasury** The second period of Navy control ends. Peacetime administration returns to Treasury.	Navy / USN → Treasury
1946 16 JUL	**Permanent postwar integration** Marine-safety transfer becomes permanent; bureau abolished. Vessel-documentation functions remain with Customs.	Treasury
1967 1 APR	**Coast Guard moves to Transportation** Transfers to the newly created Department of Transportation. Treasury administration ends.	Treasury → Transportation
2003 1 MAR	**Coast Guard moves to Homeland Security** Transfers to the Department of Homeland Security. Transportation administration ends.	Transportation → Homeland Security

Department names are abbreviated above. Navy / USN means service under Navy Department control.
Large arrow markers highlight the four major transfers: WWI, WWII, Transportation, and Homeland Security.
Sources: National Archives (Record Groups 26 and 41); U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office (organizational chronology).
Historical clarification: Bureau of Navigation established in 1884; lighthouse origins were in Treasury.