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**Michael Angell, Associate Editor** | Sep 08, 2021 4:19PM EDT



The Packer Avenue Marine Terminal is said to be dealing with three times the amount of containers that it was designed to handle. Photo credit: Shutterstock.com.

The Port of Philadelphia's (PhilaPort) main container terminal will not service ships through the rest of this week as the facility seeks to clear out a backlog of containers that has resulted in truckers reporting higher-than-usual turn times. In addition to high volumes coming into the port, a limited number of available chassis and railcars is hindering the ability to clear out the boxes.

Operator Greenwich Terminals said in a notice Tuesday that due to the number of "long-dwelling containers" at the Packer Avenue Marine Terminal, "it will be necessary to cease vessel operations for a period of three days." Greenwich said suspending vessel operations from Wednesday through Friday would allow its workers and equipment to focus on clearing containers out of its yard.

It asked that shippers “retrieve as much import cargo as possible during this dedicated terminal operations time period.”

“The decision to delay vessels is not a decision that has been taken lightly,” Greenwich said in the notice. “However, with the current state of the port operations as a whole, we feel that this will be the best way that we can help the trade community.”

Philadelphia's Tioga Marine Terminal also handles containers, but similar problems have not been reported there.

Four container ships are expected to arrive at Packer this week: *Maersk Karachi*, *MSC Arushi R.*, *Oluf Maersk*, and *MSC Olia*, according to tracking data from Sea-web, a sister company of JOC.com within IHS Markit. Greenwich said that cut-off times for receiving export cargo will be adjusted in coordination with ocean carriers.

Philadelphia, like other US ports, is seeing a major boost in the number of imports it is handling, according to PIERS, a sister company of JOC.com within IHS Markit. Philadelphia's total imports rose 23 percent year over year to 242,735 TEU during the first seven months of 2021.

Those higher volumes, along with chassis and labor shortages, have resulted in longer container dwell times for major import gateways across the country, including Los Angeles and Long Beach, Savannah, Charleston, New York and New Jersey, and Houston. Griff Lynch, CEO of the Georgia Ports Authority, told JOC.com in late August that if importers do not pick up containers more quickly from Savannah's Garden City Terminal, the facility may have to slow the unloading of vessels until boxes are vacated from its yard.

Just a few days later, Gene Seroka, executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, delivered a similar message to importers in an interview with CNBC, “urging” cargo owners to retrieve containers from overflowing Southern California marine terminals.

## Truckers report hours of delays at Packer

In Philadelphia, those volumes have also resulted in longer-than-normal turn times for drayage drivers at the Packer facility, according to Jason Hilsenbeck, president of intermodal trucking directory Drayage.com.

He said carriers that serve Philadelphia are recently reporting turn times of between three and six hours for drivers at Packer versus the 40-minute turn time that PhilaPort was promoting to shippers earlier this summer.

One drayage carrier said that efficiency at Packer is running between 25 and 50 percent less than what it would be normally, Hilsenbeck said.

Tim Avanzato, a vice president at Lanca Sales, which imports and exports food service disposables through Philadelphia and other ports, said the marine terminal is dealing with three times the volume it typically handles. Packer is designed to store 2,200 containers, but currently has about 6,600 containers in its yard, he said.

Avanzato said Holt Logistics, which owns Greenwich Terminals, made other moves over the course of the summer to accommodate the high volumes, including opening another yard across the street from Packer to store some of the overflow.

Packer has periodically offered extended hours until 11:30 pm, which it will offer this week, to handle the retrieval of dry containers, Avanzato said. Saturday gate openings have also been offered to

help move containers off its yard, although it was not clear if Saturday hours would be offered this week.

"They are paying the expense for the extra shifts," Avanzato said. "They are clogged for space. But they are trying very hard to make it right."

He said the backlogs are extending to the railroad, with dwell for ocean containers approaching five to seven days. CSX Transportation, which offers rail service from Philadelphia, said that it has not had to meter container traffic into its intermodal yard near the port.

A logistics manager for an electronic products importer who asked not to be identified said her firm has been told by its forwarders that Philadelphia is dealing with heavier-than-normal volumes and that available chassis are limited. But she said her firm is still able to easily get its containers out of the port.

"We've been told Philadelphia is congested, but from our perspective we are not seeing additional delays," she said.

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