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Vessel delays mount at Chinese ports amid bad weather, COVID-19 surge



Wait times at Ningbo (above) have increased to two days owing to bad weather while terminal utilization is about 77 percent, according to Hapag-Lloyd. Photo credit: lightrain / Shutterstock.com.

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Keith Wallis, Special Correspondent | Dec 30, 2022, 9:37 AM EST



Bad weather and a surge in COVID-19 cases are hitting productivity at major ports in China and South Korea, leading to longer wait times and vessel queues, carriers and analysts say.

Hapag-Lloyd and Ocean Network Express (ONE) said bad weather delays were particularly acute at Ningbo and Qingdao while Busan is restricting gate-in for export and transshipment cargo to alleviate severe yard congestion.

Hapag-Lloyd said average wait times at Qingdao have increased to about three days owing to congestion caused by intermittent port closures as a result of strong winds and fog.

Wait times at Ningbo have increased to two days because of bad weather, while terminal utilization is about 77 percent, the carrier added in an update this week.

ONE said several services have been delayed because of congestion at Ningbo.

At Busan, average yard utilization is about 78 percent while wait times are up to four days at some terminals. Gate-in for export and transshipment cargo is limited to about four days before vessel arrival to improve yard utilization at several terminals, including HMM PSA New-Port Terminal and Pusan Newport International Terminal, Hapag-Lloyd said.

Dredging work carried out by Busan Port Authority has also restricted berth access, the carrier added.

COVID-19 surge disrupts operations

Maritime research firm Linerlytica said soaring COVID-19 numbers in China have also hit operations at terminals and ports in the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas and at Bohai Bay.

“Congestion has built up around the Chinese ports of Shanghai, Ningbo, and Qingdao over the past week, pushing up the number of container ships waiting at Chinese anchorages to 850,000 TEU — the highest levels seen since September,” the firm said in a commentary Thursday.

Linerlytica said congestion and vessel queues at Chinese ports could worsen in the run-up to the start of the Lunar New Year on Jan. 22 as COVID-19 infections continue to surge, affecting the number of dockers turning up for work.

China announced it had stopped recording the number of new cases on Dec. 14 after ending its three-year zero-COVID policy a week earlier following widespread public unrest against the lockdown, quarantine, and testing measures. Official estimates, though, suggest more than 250 million people could have been infected since the

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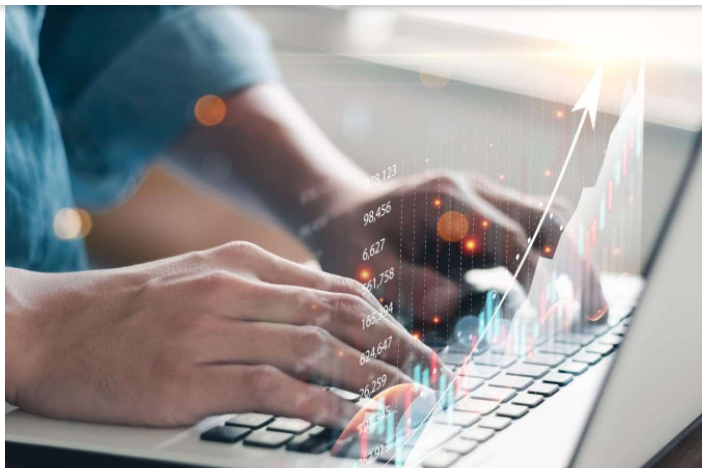
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The FMC's ruling seemingly strikes a blow to the "once in demurrage, always in demurrage" concept that had given ocean carriers a blank check to assess penalties when a container goes into detention or demurrage, no matter the circumstances.



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Partnerships between small forwarders and early-stage software vendors offer a symbiotic opportunity to shape product direction that is not possible with more established technology providers.

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