

## BC container ports set for shutdown after foremen begin strike



*The vessel impact from the labor action in British Columbia is limited thus far as only a few container ships are at the province's ports. Photo credit: Wirestock Creators / Shutterstock.com.*

**Michael Angell, Senior Editor | Nov 4, 2024, 4:36 PM EST**

British Columbia's container ports are set for an indefinite shut down this week as maritime employers planned to lock out longshore foremen after they began a strike Monday. While the lockout would not technically affect other longshore workers, uncertainty about the job actions taken by the foremen's union will force marine terminals to shutter.

The British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) said in a statement Monday that the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) 514, representing about 730 longshore foremen, began its strike Monday morning at ports across the province. In response, the BCMEA said it would begin a lockout of Local 514 members with Monday's evening shift and "continuing until further notice."

Canadian labor law requires that employers see strike activity commence before issuing a formal lockout notice. That strike activity could take the form of an actual picket, a refusal to work an overtime shift, or similar job actions.

Canada's Labor Minister Steve MacKinnon said in a statement Saturday that while federal mediators are available, "it is the responsibility of the parties to reach an agreement."

The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority said that it expects disruptions at the Port of Vancouver beginning Monday. Vancouver is Canada's largest container port.

The vessel impact appears limited so far as only one ship, the 12,726-TEU *YM Target*, is currently at berth in Vancouver, according to Sea-web a sister product of the *Journal of Commerce* within S&P Global. The 4,250-TEU *Cosco Auckland* is currently at berth at the Port of Prince Rupert, which would also be affected by a work stoppage. No container ships are sitting at Vancouver's anchorages due to inclement weather in the region.

At least seven container ships are scheduled to call Vancouver through mid-November, Sea-web data shows. Three are expected to call Prince Rupert.

Canadian Pacific-Kansas City railroad said in a schedule update Monday that it's no longer accepting export cargo for Vancouver due to the strike.

## Union 'extremely angry' about lockout

Local 514 said in a statement last week that its members are "extremely angry" that the BCMEA planned to lock out its members. The union said its members were only planning to refuse overtime work or to implement new technology at the port, rather than a full-blown walkout. The union alleged the lockout is an "attempt to force the federal government to intervene in the dispute."

But the BCMEA said in a Saturday statement that the lockout was a necessary precaution. Canadian labor law allows unions to change from one type of job action to another, creating a risk for a full-blown walkout, BCMEA said. Due to the heavy reliance on overtime shifts for cargo handling, a refusal to work overtime would severely disrupt port operations anyway, and terminals won't request longshore labor without union supervision.

"Once a union commences strike action, the Canada Labor Code has no restrictions on the union subsequently changing the nature of its strike," the BCMEA said in Saturday's statement. "For example, a strike may start as an overtime ban and escalate — in minutes, hours or days — to a full-scale strike action without notice,

where all workers walk off the job. This potential creates tremendous uncertainty and significant operational and safety challenges for operators.”

Local 514 has been working without a collective bargaining agreement since March 2023. The BCMEA is offering longshore foremen a 19.2% raise over four years, similar to the pay raise accepted by other ILWU longshore workers in Canada.

*Contact Michael Angell at [michael.angell@spglobal.com](mailto:michael.angell@spglobal.com).*

© 2024 S&P Global. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

You are permitted to print or download extracts from this material for your personal use only. None of this material may be used for any commercial or public use. For more information on reprints/eprints, please visit <https://subscribe.joc.com/mediasolutions/>.