

Maersk signs pact to develop methanol bunkering at Japan's Yokohama port



Yokohama's mayor said the port (pictured) plans to invite more carrier partners to join the methanol bunkering initiative. Photo credit: levgenii Bakhvalov / Shutterstock.com.

Keith Wallis, Special Correspondent | Dec 28, 2023, 1:44 PM EST

Maersk has teamed up with Mitsubishi Gas Chemical and city authorities in Yokohama to jointly develop green methanol bunkering infrastructure at Japan's second-busiest container port.

The move is the latest effort by Maersk to secure methanol supplies for its fleet of 25 methanol-enabled vessels, including 12 16,000-TEU green methanol-powered ships that will start to be delivered in January.

Maersk and its two Japanese partners will plan for the development and operation of port bunkering facilities for green methanol at Yokohama as part of a four-point plan outlined in a memorandum of understanding signed Wednesday.

“As shipping companies increasingly prioritize decarbonization efforts, the availability of green fuel bunkering options and the feasibility to carry out the operation in Japan becomes paramount,” Toru Nishiyama, Maersk’s Northeast Asia managing director, said in a statement from the carrier.

APM Terminals Japan operates Yokohama’s four-berth Minami-Honmoku container terminal, the biggest deepwater terminal in Japan. Yokohama’s mayor, Takeharu Yamanaka, said the port plans to invite more carrier partners to join the methanol bunkering initiative.

The Yokohama pact comes about a month after Maersk signed a long-term supply agreement with China green energy developer Goldwind for 500,000 metric tons of bio-methanol and e-methanol produced from a plant at Hinggan League in Inner Mongolia, about 600 miles west of Beijing. Goldwind is expected to make a final investment decision on the plant shortly, with methanol production starting in 2026.

Carriers search for supplies

With about 130 methanol-enabled dual-fuel container ships on the water or on order, carriers have been scrambling to secure methanol supplies. Hong Kong’s Orient Overseas Container Line confirmed it has held talks with at least two potential methanol suppliers, including utility company Towngas.

HMM has signed a memorandum of understanding with five methanol suppliers, including Proman of Switzerland, Thailand’s PTTEP and Hyundai Corporation to supply the fuel for nine dual-fuel 9,000-TEU container ships it ordered last February.

Maersk, through its C2X affiliate, has also partnered with the Egyptian government to look at developing a \$3 billion methanol plant in the Suez Canal economic zone, the carrier said in October.

Highlighting the challenge of using methanol as a bunker fuel, Maersk said a successful rollout “heavily relies on the establishment of port bunkering infrastructure for methanol worldwide.”

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