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China returns fire with retaliatory port fees targeting US-affiliated ships

APL would be one of the US-affiliated entities targeted by port fees China intends to implement next week. Photo credit: Robert V Schwemmer / Shutterstock.com.

Keith Wallis, Asia Special Correspondent | Oct 10, 2025, 10:11 AM EDT

(Updated to add comment from Matson).

China on Friday outlined new port fees targeting ships operated or owned by US companies. The plan mirrors the one the White House is set to implement Tuesday that targets Chinese tonnage.

In a statement urging the US government to change course, China's Ministry of Transport said starting Oct. 14 — the same day the US port fees go into effect — it would begin charging US-operated ships or those where US shareholders control more than a 25% stake.

China's retaliatory fees, which start in the first year at 400 renminbi ($56) per net ton, would hit the likes of US-owned Matson harder than US fees would hit Cosco Shipping.

The measures, which mirror those imposed on Chinese-owned or -built ships calling at US ports, were announced by the Transport Ministry in a two-page statement. The fees also apply to US-flagged ships and US-built vessels.

The ministry said the fees are being introduced in direct retaliation to the US Trade Representative's (USTR) moves to impose port fees on Chinese-owned, -controlled or -built ships, adding the US fees "seriously violate the relevant principles of international trade and the Sino-US maritime agreement and causes serious damage to maritime trade between China and the United States."

"We urge the United States to immediately correct its wrong practices and stop its unreasonable suppression of China's maritime industry," a ministry spokesperson said.

Under China's plan, the targeted US ships will be charged $56 per net ton from next week, increasing to $90 per net ton from April 17, 2026; $123 from April 17, 2027; and $157 from April 17, 2028.

"If a ship calls at multiple Chinese ports on the same voyage, the special port fee for the ship shall be paid only at the first port of call, and the subsequent port of call shall not be charged," the Transport Ministry said. "The same ship shall be charged no more than five voyages within a year."

By comparison, the USTR fee schedule will charge the targeted Chinese vessels $50 per net ton and the higher of $18 per net ton or $120 per container discharged.

Maersk, Matson and APL under the gun

At first blush, the fees targeting US entities would affect Matson, Maersk Line and APL, part of the CMA CGM group.

"Furthermore, this could also apply to vessels owned by Seaspan," Lars Jensen, a maritime analyst and *Journal of Commerce* contributor, said in a LinkedIn post Friday. "Seaspan's ultimate owner is Poseidon, where it seems that just over 25% of the ownership is US-based.

"This could be quite an impact as it means that the more than 100 vessels owned by Seaspan, and chartered by a variety of major container lines, would now be subject to fees in China in addition to the fees in the US for their Chinese-built vessels," Jensen added.

Matson told customers in an advisory Friday it had no plans to change its service schedule and would not pass on the cost of China's new port fees to customers via a surcharge. "We remain fully committed to providing…service offerings from China and the trans-Pacific market to the US," the carrier said.

The China port fees would apparently not apply to Israel's Zim Integrated Shipping Services because, while there is a substantial US shareholding, the almost 19% would not cross the required threshold.

The Transport Ministry said the fees will be collected by the maritime administration agency responsible for the port that is the ship's first call.

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