

## Cosco, OOCL incurred over \$40 million in initial US port fees



*Cosco and OOCL's post-Panamax fleet is getting hit with fees ranging between \$3 million and \$4 million for a US port call. Photo credit: Sheila Fitzgerald / Shutterstock.com.*

[Michael Angell, Senior Editor, East Coast Ports](#) | Oct 24, 2025, 4:36 PM EDT

New US port fees targeting China's maritime industry cost Cosco Shipping and its OOCL subsidiary just over \$42 million in the first week the fees were in place, according to vessel-tracking data detailing their US calls.

Outside of those two carriers, the fees have largely on three Chinese-built container ships, with those costs likely totaling a few million dollars.

The early estimates coincide with prior forecasts of how much of the new port fees would fall on Cosco and OOCL, with their combined fee burden potentially reaching \$2 billion in a year's time should no changes be made to the US fee structure.

Vessel tracking data from Sea-web, a sister company of the *Journal of Commerce* within S&P Global, shows that eight Cosco-operated container ships and seven operated by OOCL made a US port call in Oct. 14–20. Oct. 14 was the first day that ocean carriers would be subject to the US Trade Representative's (USTR) penalties targeting China's maritime industry.

The fees, which were the result of a USTR investigation started in 2024 and concluded earlier this year, are \$50 per net ton for the first US port call of a Chinese-operated ship in the first year of implementation, with the levy escalating annually through 2028. Chinese-built ships operated by other carriers face the higher of either \$18 per ton or \$120 per container discharged.

The 15 ships operated by Cosco and OOCL during the first week of the fees, most of which are post-Panamax size, had net tonnage of 855,718, Sea-web data shows. Based on the USTR fee schedule, that would equate to \$42.8 million in fees for the ships on their initial port call.

The size of each fee paid varied widely. The 13,800-TEU *Cosco Shipping Jasmine*, which called Savannah on Oct. 14, would have incurred a \$4.2 million fee based on its net tonnage. The 4,253-TEU *Felixstowe*, also operated by Cosco, faced a \$1.2 million fee due to its smaller size.

Nine of the Cosco and OOCL ships were built in South Korea, while four were built in China and one in Japan.

At the first week's run rate, Cosco and OOCL could incur \$2.2 billion in US port fees during the first year. That aligns with a September estimate from investment bank HSBC, which said the fees represent between 5% to 7% of the two carriers' annual combined revenue.

Cosco and the USTR did not respond to requests for comment.

Cosco, which is the majority owner of OOCL, decried the USTR fees as a "discriminatory decision" when they were first unveiled in April. However, one month ahead of the Oct. 14 start date, Cosco said it remained committed to the US market, with no plans to charge shippers for the fee.

HSBC estimated the US port fee would translate to a cost for Chinese carriers of about \$600 per container, while an April report from consultancy BluSpark said the fee could be \$550 per container. Assuming the 15 ships that called in Oct. 14–20 were at fully loaded capacity, the fee translates to about \$657 per container.

## Zim also faces fees

Out of 160 container ships over 4,000-TEU that called the US between Oct. 14 and Oct. 20, only three not operated by Cosco or OOCL were built in China and likely subject to the fees, according to Sea-web, showing the extent to which other ocean carriers redeployed Chinese tonnage to avoid the fees.

The figure does not include two Chinese-built ships operated by CMA CGM's US-flag subsidiary APL because the USTR has exempted those ships. It also does not include container/roll-on/roll-off vessels such as those operated by Atlantic Container Line, itself facing \$1.4 million in costs for each port call due to the USTR's designation of the carrier's vessels.

Zim operated all three of the Chinese-built ships calling the US, all between 5,315 and 7,000 TEU in nominal capacity. Based on the net tonnage of the three ships, Zim likely incurred fees between \$450,000 and \$700,000 for the first US call. While it's unclear how many containers the ships discharged, the cost would translate to approximately \$270 per loaded container.

A week prior to the fees going into effect, Zim said in a customer advisory that it would not charge shippers for the fees, but it "reserves the right to reassess this position should additional cost implications or regulation evolve." Zim did not return a request for comment.

Zim operated a fourth Chinese-built ship, the 4,249-TEU *Spyros V*, but it's below the 55,000 deadweight tons threshold for the USTR fees. Similarly, the China-built, 4,250-TEU *Vancouver Star*, operated by Hapag-Lloyd, is also below the size threshold.

*This article has been updated to reflect that the *Spyros V* and *Vancouver Star* are not subject to the USTR's port fees due to their size. The *SM Tianjin*, is also not subject to the fees because it is operated by South Korea's SM Lines, not China United Lines.*

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

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