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US east coast dockworker union president vows to 'hit the streets' on October 1

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Port Authority of New York and New Jersey

The union threatening to go on strike at ports along the US east and Gulf coasts from October 1 has come out with a renewed tough stance over wage negotiations as the clock ticks down to what could be a massive supply chain dislocation for global container shipping.

Contract negotiations have broken down between the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and port operators. The current agreement, which covers about 45,000 dockworkers at facilities including six of the 10 busiest US ports, expires September 30.

The ILA have begun wage scale meetings to review their contract demands with its president, Harold Daggett, warning yesterday in a video uploaded to the union's website: "The ILA most definitely will hit the streets on October 1st".

The ILA most definitely will hit the streets on October 1

Daggett reiterated demands for no automated or semi-automated terminals across the US east and Gulf coasts, hinting too that his union would attempt to get fellow workers on the west coast to join the industrial action.

Danish carrier Maersk has warned in a recent advisory to clients that should a general work stoppage occur, even a one-week shutdown could take four to six weeks to recover from, with significant backlogs and delays compounding with each passing day.

Experts at Sea-Intelligence, a Danish container shipping analyst firm, suggest that for every one day of strike, it might well take at least four to five days to “clean up” to get back to normal. A one-week strike on October 1 would lead to large congestion problems into mid-November, according to Sea-Intelligence, while a two-week strike would mean ports would not get back to normal operations until 2025.

In June last year, a deal was finally struck for a six-year labour contract at 29 US west coast ports, bringing to a close a fraught 13 months of stalled negotiations, walk-outs and cargoes emigrating to alternate locations.

Meanwhile, in Canada, the union representing foremen at British Columbia’s ports say members have voted overwhelmingly to authorise a strike if necessary in a labour dispute with port employers.

Local 514 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, representing ship and dock foremen, said in a statement that members voted 96% in favour of authorising a strike. However, no 72-hour strike or lockout notice has been issued.