

## Montreal dockers begin “indefinite” overtime ban

by [Leo Ryan](#) 18 hours ago

Charging that maritime employers are “dragging their heels” in deadlocked negotiations, Port of Montreal longshoremen today began an “indefinite” ban on overtime work in another industrial action short of a general strike. The Port of Montreal warned that the ban could slow down or disrupt the handling of 50% of the goods transiting through Eastern Canada’s biggest container port.

The new pressure tactic comes on the heels of a partial strike last week which paralyzed traffic for three days at the two container terminals operated by Termont. It was business as usual at all other facilities. A negotiating session was held last Friday in the presence of two federal mediators after the longshoremen resumed their activities.

“We are still in negotiation with the assistance of two mediators,” noted Michel Murray, chief advisor to Local 375 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) which represents 1,200 longshoremen.



Port of Montreal

“We are prepared to negotiate intensely, but since the employer is dragging their heels, we are turning up the pressure for them to devote their energies to find a solution,” he said.

Murray went on to recall that “being a longshoreman was an old profession, but it is time to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to modernize archaic practices at the port. There are solutions. One must simply be open to hear them and be at the table to negotiate them.”

The current collective agreement expired on December 31, 2023. Biggest outstanding issues appear to be scheduling of working hours and work-life balance more than salary issues, judging by the most recent comments from union officials.

### **MEA Response**

Responding to the overtime ban, the Maritime Employers Association (MEA) stated it would have a “significant impact on deployed crews and the tasks required for operations.” The MEA warned that incomplete shifts would cause imminent slowdowns or even halt operations at the port, and that as a result it has “decided that employees assigned to shifts with incomplete crews will not be paid.”

For its part, the Port of Montreal was prompt in expressing its concern over the impact of the renewed pressure tactics on the logistics chain and on the supply of goods and commodities for businesses and the public.

While all Port of Montreal terminals will remain open, the longshoremen will not be working overtime as part of their duties.

“This could result in processing delays and a backlog of containers waiting to be handled. At present, around ten ships expected at the port could be affected by these pressure tactics, notably at the following terminals and handling companies: Cast, Maisonneuve, Racine, Viau, Logistec, Lantic and Canest.

Not affected by the situation: liquid bulk handling, the Oceanex service with Newfoundland and the Viterro grain terminal.

### **Vessel Re-Routing?**

According to Port of Montreal estimates, the overtime strike may slow down or disrupt the handling of around 50% of goods transiting through the Port of Montreal, both imports and exports. These goods include food, medical and pharmaceutical products, raw materials for industry, consumer goods for retail, as well as a variety of other goods crucial to the operations of thousands of businesses.

“The climate of uncertainty associated with the current negotiations and pressure tactics is jeopardizing the reliability of supply chains and the competitiveness of the St. Lawrence maritime corridor,” the Montreal Port Authority affirmed. “The APM hopes that a mutually satisfactory agreement will be signed as soon as possible, while businesses and citizens rely on a reliable and competitive port and logistics chain.”

Meanwhile, there has so far been no official confirmation that some liner shipping companies may be exploring the re-routing of vessels to alternative ports to mitigate the costs of potential cargo delays at Montreal. Earlier this week, Maersk announced it will slap a surcharge of \$2,000 per container on Canada-bound freight from Europe as of October 23 – but it was qualified as a *Peak Season Surcharge*.

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