

Maersk urges container pickup ahead of potential port strike

Liner operator also blanks sailings in congested trans-Pacific

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A Maersk container is handled at Port Houston. (Photo: Jim Allen/FreightWaves)

The world's second-largest container carrier wants shippers to clear out their boxes from U.S. Eastern Seaboard and Gulf Coast ports ahead of a possible longshore strike Jan. 15.

Maersk, in an advisory posted Monday to its website, also asked shippers to return empty containers prior to the expiration of the extension of the current dockworkers contract.

The update from the Denmark-based operator reflected weeks of uncertainty over the drawn-out maritime labor stalemate. But it came before news [reported by FreightWaves](#) on Wednesday that the International Longshoremen's Association and port employers represented by the United States Maritime Alliance were preparing to resume negotiations on a new six-year pact.

"Considering the status, we strongly encourage our customers to pick up their laden containers and return empty containers at U.S. East and Gulf Coast ports before Jan. 15," Maersk said. "This proactive measure will help mitigate any potential disruptions at the terminals."

A work stoppage like the one by 45,000 ILA members in October would shut down container handling at dozens of port and maritime centers from Maine to Texas. Any containers left at ports would likely remain there for the duration of the strike.

While the sides agreed to a 62% pay raise following the October strike, it is conditional on successful negotiations on other issues including benefits, container royalties and, most publicly, automation.

Neither the ILA nor the USMX have confirmed the resumption of bargaining.

“Our teams are actively developing contingency plans to minimize the impact should a labor disruption occur,” the advisory said. “We are committed to keeping you informed and will share any updates or new developments as they arise.”

Maersk separately on Tuesday said delays and disruptions have created gaps in its Asia-North America network, forcing it to blank, or cancel, voyages on a half-dozen Asia-North America services. The details:

- TP1: The eastbound 505N voyage scheduled to depart Xiamen, China, on Feb. 8 has been voided, as has the westbound 508S slated to sail from Prince Rupert, British Columbia, on March 1.
- TP16: The eastbound 503E leaving Xiamen Jan. 16 has been voided, as has the westbound 508W originating in Jacksonville, Florida, Feb. 21.
- TP88: The eastbound 503E sailing from Xiamen Jan. 18 has been voided, as has the westbound 508W scheduled to depart Houston Feb. 22.