

# Canada ports facing container delays due to weather, rail issues

Significant container dwell at Halifax, Vancouver

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Tuesday, March 18, 2025



A ONE container ship calls the Fairview Cove terminal at the Port of Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada. (Photo: PSA International)

Delays are hampering intermodal operations at several container ports in North America as weather and rail woes hit gateways on both coasts, according to a DHL port update for March.

On the east coast, Canada's Port of Halifax is seeing significant vessel delays due to harsh North Atlantic weather conditions. Compounding this issue is an exceptionally high rail dwell time, averaging 18 days. This combination is creating a bottleneck that requires careful planning for shipments routing through this port.

Vessels continue to arrive in Halifax off proforma, or deviating significantly from schedule, primarily due to weather over the North Atlantic, the forwarder said in the update. Import rail dwell has marginally improved and is currently 18 days as PSA Atlantic Hub is struggling with high ground counts and a shortage of labor. Some containers are experiencing dwells as high as 30 days. PSA and CN are working together to further maximize daily rail productivity.

Issues with gantry cranes and IT systems disruptions are hitting productivity at Saint John, but terminal utilization has stabilized at 89%. Import rail dwell times are also high at 11.1 days as railcar supply is insufficient to meet the daily demand, though this is expected to improve in the next three to five days.

At the Port of Montreal, CPKC lifted an export embargo as of March 7 and yard utilization has increased to 60%. DHL called vessel productivity "strong," but winter navigation restrictions are now in full effect. Current rail dwell is 5.1 days, but inconsistent railcar supply is expected to take seven to 10 days to recover.

Among U.S. East Coast ports, Savannah, Georgia, and Norfolk, Virginia, have container dwells of five or more days, the latter seeing productivity affected by weather. New York-New Jersey had delays of two to five days, with some equipment congestion and medium-rated shortages. The update found no inland transportation issues.

On the U.S. Gulf Coast region from Florida to Texas, the Port of Miami and Port Houston showed container dwells of two to five days, with the latter showing import dwell of four days. No other disruptions were reported.

The Canadian west coast ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert are grappling with notable delays primarily from major rail issues. While equipment availability remains stable, the rail challenges are causing significant disruptions.

Vancouver is experiencing delays of five days and longer to unload ships, while dwell time for outbound containers is 20-30 days due to major rail issues. Delays to import containers are two to five days.

On the U.S. West Coast, the report said the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex has long dwell times of three to seven days, while it, Seattle-Tacoma and Oakland, California, all show two to five days' delay unloading ships. Tacoma's Husky Terminal had dwell of six days.

Mexico is experiencing substantial delays, especially at ports like Lázaro Cárdenas and Manzanillo. Road issues are the primary culprit, necessitating adjustments in preparation and planning for shipments to and from these locations.

In Europe, France and Spain are currently hot spots of logistics disruption due to ongoing but intermittent labor and rail strikes. These actions are causing terminal closures and widespread transport disruption, significantly impacting the movement of goods throughout the region.

The United Kingdom and surrounding areas are facing minor delays, with equipment adequacy generally maintained. However, some congestion is noted at key ports such as Southampton and Felixstowe, potentially causing slight schedule adjustments.

In the Middle East and Africa region, Cape Town, South Africa, and Mombasa, Kenya, are experiencing severe delays and congestion. Wind-related issues and equipment shortages are the main factors contributing to these disruptions. Shippers should expect extended wait times and plan accordingly.

In China, minor weather-related delays are expected in Shanghai and Ningbo. However, equipment availability remains sufficient, mitigating the impact of these delays.

Southeast Asia presents a varied picture. While Jakarta is operating smoothly without significant delays, Singapore is grappling with yard congestion, which may affect shipment timelines.

The update said that some areas, particularly Oceania, are facing significant equipment shortages, especially of 20-foot containers. Shippers should plan ahead and consider alternative container sizes where possible.

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