



‘Minimal impact’ expected from LA-LB trucker picket, ports say

Reynolds Hutchins, Associate Editor | Jun 15, 2017 5:32PM EDT

A planned truck driver and warehouse worker protest next week at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach is expected to have “minimal impact” on operations, according to port officials and at least one employer targeted by workers.

Drivers with Teamsters union Local 848 announced their plans to picket port terminals and adjacent facilities starting next Monday and through the end of the week, at least.

The protest, the 15th in four years, is part of an ongoing push to have port truck drivers recognized as employees rather than independent contractors — a move, the organizers argue, that would improve their pay and workplace protections.

Port officials say history has prepared them to work with those picketing and those being picketed to keep cargo moving at the nation’s busiest port.

“I think over the past couple years we’ve seen a dozen maybe more of these. They’ve had minimal impact,” Phillip Sanfield, a spokesperson for the Port of Los Angeles, told JOC.com Thursday. “Each time they do it at a warehouse or trucking company, oftentimes they will pair that with a handful of demonstrators outside a terminal, as well.”

Although the scope and size of the upcoming demonstration was not clear Thursday, XPO Logistics was cited by a number of port and Teamsters officials as a likely target.

“We know that XPO Logistics drivers, at, we think, three different locations, are going to go out on strike,” said Nick Weiner, a spokesperson for the Teamsters told JOC.com. Other Teamsters spokespeople have said workers will be picketing three XPO locations in Los Angeles, Long Beach, and San Diego.

As it [expands its supply chain footprint](#), XPO in particular has come under pressure from the Teamsters, who accuse the company of [misclassifying port truck drivers](#) as contractors, who cannot be unionized, rather than employees.

The union’s “Justice for Port Drivers” campaign has [mounted protests and filed lawsuits](#) that aim to change the legal classification of drayage drivers, mostly owner-operators, to employees.

XPO has [denied](#) the allegations and challenged the efforts to change its drivers' classification. "We know firsthand the majority of our owner operators prefer to work as independent contractors and we'll continue to advocate for their right to do so," an XPO spokesperson told JOC.com.

The strike announcement on Thursday came just three days after Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti and Long Beach mayor Robert Garcia signed a [new agreement](#) impacting the drivers and trucking companies that serve the port. The deal between the two cities agrees "to move toward the goal of zero emissions" at the ports and establish a goal for zero-emission trucks by 2035.

Drivers with the local union chapter have complained that those goals, although noble in their pursuits, do not take into account their financial impact on workers.

In 2008, the ports instituted the Clean Truck Program, an initiative to reduce air pollution from harbor trucks by more than 90 percent over roughly three years.

"The program did a great job slashing deadly diesel pollution and getting thousands of new clean trucks at the port in a short amount of time," Eric Tate, secretary-treasurer for Teamsters Local 848, said at the news conference Thursday where the union announced its protest. "But who paid for it? Not the corporations who own the cargo. The drivers ended up bearing the bulk of the cost."

Drivers absorb those costs, Tate said, because trucking companies refuse to recognize them as employees, withholding higher pay and workplace protections in order to cover the cost of greener, more efficient equipment.

"This system looks like sharecropping, just on wheels," Tate said.

More than \$40 million in backpay has been awarded to drivers since the 2008 Clean Truck Program went into effect, according to Tate and the Justice for Port Truck Drivers group.

"The California government has ordered more than \$40 million in backpay to port drivers because of this sharecropping. When will the port ban, suspend, and penalize these lawbreakers? When will LA and Long Beach say, if you want to do business here, you've got to follow the laws?"

Interested in sharing [JOC.com](#) content? Please view our current [Copyright and Legal Disclaimer](#) information, as well as our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) to ensure proper protocol is followed. For any questions, contact the Customer Support team at our [Help link](#).

Contact Reynolds Hutchins at reynolds.hutchins@ihsmarkit.com and follow us on Twitter: [@Hutchins_JOC](#).