

Longshore union: 2 Los Angeles and Long Beach port firms fined for night work

By Andrew Edwards , Press-Telegram

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Shipping containers are seen at the Port of Los Angeles in this December 2012 file photo. Cargo shipments rose at the port in 2014 despite increasing congestion problems. (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

The labor union representing dockworkers at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach says two companies that unload cargo at the ports have been unfairly punished for working crews at night.

Three local chapters of the [International Longshore and Warehouse Union](#) laid out their

complaint in a Jan. 15 letter to Gene Seroka, executive director for Port of Los Angeles. Union leaders contend in their message that two firms, [Pasha Stevedoring & Terminals](#) and [Metro Ports](#), have been fined roughly \$50,000 and suspended from their membership in the [Pacific Maritime Association](#) for allowing the nocturnal shifts.

“These companies are being penalized because they did not follow PMA’s directive to halt ordering longshore labor for loading and unloading vessels on the night shift,” the union states in the letter.

A spokesman for the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents businesses at West Coast ports, said he could not confirm whether the association had taken any action relative to Pasha or Metro because doing so would go against a policy that forbids statements on member companies.

PMA spokesman Steve Getzug did say, however, that the association stands by its decision to shut down night shifts in light of port congestion that PMA blames on union tactics.

“It was a decision it didn’t make lightly, but in light of the slowdown,” he said.

Without a contract since July, the union and employers are in the midst of increasingly strained labor negotiations, which have only intensified since the end of the holiday shipping season.

The PMA reduced, and then on Jan. 13, moved to [stop all nighttime unloading of ships](#) at the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports to concentrate on clearing out cargo containers. The employers have blamed the congestion on the union for refusing to supply a sufficient number of skilled crane operators.

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Data from the PMA shows that, on average, roughly 100 or so crane operators’ shifts would be filled at either the port of Los Angeles or Long Beach prior to Nov. 3 of this past year. After that date, Getzug says the union began to refuse to send qualified workers to the harbor and the number of filled shifts fell to 20 or 40 per day through the Christmas season. The number of filled shifts continued to fall after New Year’s Day.

The [union says they have done nothing of the sort](#) and accused PMA of trying to pressure dockworkers by denying them work.

Instead of simply handling shipping containers, Pasha and Metro respectively handle steel and [petroleum coke](#), goods that are classified as “break bulk” because they are not packed into containers, according to the letter.

Union spokesman Adan Ortega said Friday that it would make no sense for the PMA to want to stop either Pasha or Metro from working at night because those companies would not be adding to the pile of shipping containers.

“For us, that’s the telltale sign that they’re not serious about the containers,” Ortega said.

Getzug disputed that view. From the PMA’s perspective, a shortage of crane workers means there’s an imperative to focus on moving as many containers as can be moved under current conditions.

“The most critical work is moving the transtainers. You need to move what’s already in,” Getzug said.

[Transtainer](#) is a term for cranes that move shipping containers inside the port complex.

Pasha has not stopped working at night, but the company declined to comment on the allegations raised by the letter.

Metro Ports could not be reached for comment.

The Port of Los Angeles sent a statement declaring that port officials are in contact with both sides in the dispute, but that issues raised in the letter are between the PMA and ILWU.

About [6,000 port workers marched](#) Thursday night in San Pedro to support their union and protest nighttime work cuts.



Andrew Edwards

Reach the author at Andrew.Edwards@langnews.com or follow Andrew on Twitter: [@AndrewEdwardsLB](https://twitter.com/AndrewEdwardsLB).

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