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PMA CALLS ON ILWU LEADERS TO STOP WITHHOLDING SKILLED WORKERS; UNION'S ACTION IS CAUSING TERMINAL CONGESTION TO REACH BREAKING POINT

Los Angeles (January 2, 2015) – The ILWU clearly subscribes to the “best defense is a good offense” theory. The Union, and Local 13 in particular, has led a sustained campaign over the last two months to withhold critically-important, skilled longshore workers from their shifts on the docks.

The qualified yard crane drivers play a vital role by delivering and receiving container loads from truckers. By withholding them, the union has negatively impacted cargo-handling operations throughout Southern California. Union leaders have done this in an attempt to gain leverage on employers in the midst of contentious negotiations for a new coast-wide contract. The Union’s work actions started at the end of October when contract talks began to stall.

The PMA estimates that since the ILWU took its unilateral action in Southern California, the average number of shifts for qualified crane operators has dropped from an average of more than 110 per day to under 35 per day, resulting in tens of thousands of containers available for discharge sitting on the docks at the twin ports. Employers put in orders for the number of operators needed, and the ILWU unilaterally cut back those orders by two-thirds.

“Removing qualified yard crane drivers from terminal operations is the equivalent of a football coach sending out 10 players and no quarterback. You can’t run the play effectively,” said PMA spokesperson Wade Gates. “The congestion in the terminals is near a breaking point.”

To focus efforts on clearing containers from terminal yards and get them moving to their final destinations, PMA is reducing the number of workers ordered to unload ships on night shifts, thereby avoiding the prospect of creating gridlock that the additional unloading of ships would create.

“It makes no sense to maintain the pace of removing containers from ships when there’s no room for them on the terminals,” Gates said. “If a parking lot were full, you would clear out empty spaces before bringing in more cars. The same rule applies here.”

Labor orders for the day shifts and night shift yard and gate will remain unchanged.

“It’s important to remember an essential principle of management. It’s not solely the number of longshoreman the Union is making available that matters, it’s the type of workers themselves,” Gates said. “Without qualified yard crane drivers who play a critical role in loading and offloading cargo containers from trucks, the congestion problem is made far worse at terminal yards.”

“The local leaders will focus on chassis as the problem,” Gates said, “but they are only misdirecting the public away from the core issue that has taken a difficult situation and moved it to the brink, and that’s their decision to withhold critically-important skilled workers from the terminals.”

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