

Trucker protests halt cargo movement at California's third-busiest seaport

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Independent truck drivers gather to delay the entry of trucks at a container terminal at the Port of Oakland, during a protest against California's law known as AB5, in Oakland, California, July 18, 2022. (Reuters)

Oakland, July 21 (RHC)-- Protests against a new California labor law that makes it harder for independent truckers to operate on Wednesday ground operations at the state's third-busiest seaport to a virtual halt, crimping a major artery in the U.S. supply chain.

SSA Marine, which manages the largest terminal at the Port of Oakland, in the San Francisco Bay Area, decided to close operations due to the independent trucker protest, port spokesman Robert Bernardo told Reuters.

The other marine terminals are effectively shut down for trucks, said Bernardo, adding that some vessel labor operations are under way. SSA and Everport terminal managers sent International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) dock workers home for safety reasons, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters on Wednesday.

TraPac on its website said its terminal would be closed for the first shift because protests were interfering with the entrance gate. Representatives from the terminals did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The law, AB5, also known as the “gig worker” law, sets tougher standards for classifying workers as independent contractors. Trucking industry legal challenges delayed enactment of the law for more than two years, but the US Supreme Court declined to review the case on June 30, clearing the way for it to go forward.

Backers, including the Teamsters union, say it will clamp down on labor abuses in the industry and push companies to make drivers employees. Independent truckers say they prefer the freedom of contract work and worry that the law will shoulder them with hefty costs that will wipe out their income.

Some 5,000 owner-operators ferry freight to and from the Port of Oakland. Their protests of the law started on Monday and have grown larger and more disruptive with each passing day.

Port truckers picketed at the nation’s top two seaports, at Los Angeles and Long Beach in Southern California, last week, snarling traffic and choking terminal entrances. The three California ports combined handle about half of the nation’s total container cargo volume. Unions representing dockworkers at those ports and others on the U.S. West Coast are in high-stakes contract talks with terminal operators that employ them.

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