

California truckers close Port of Oakland terminal

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A group of drivers who own and operate their own trucks, calling themselves the Port of Oakland Truckers Association, struck the Port of Oakland on Monday. As independent contractors, the nonunion truckers have joined together to call for better working conditions and pay. Citing quadrupling diesel prices, increased maintenance costs and the fact that the price they are paid per cargo load has not seen a rise in ten years, the truckers picketed and closed down the SSA terminal.

The strikers defied a temporary order filed last week by an Alameda County judge at the request of city officials barring them from interfering with cargo traffic. Over a hundred drivers met last Friday and voted to carry out Monday's action.

At about 7:00 a.m., the picketers were met by lines of baton-wielding police, who herded the drivers against the fence near the port entrance. At least two picketers were injured. Several International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) workers, saying they felt conditions were "unsafe," joined the truckers on the picket line.

The port's activities were ultimately shut down when ILWU workers refused to cross the picket line. A call went out late Monday to the public for volunteers to help man the picket line after 5:30 p.m. to keep the terminals closed overnight.

International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 President Mike Villeggiante condemned the truckers' action, saying they would make the port "look bad" and "unreliable."

The truckers are asking for compensation to meet more stringent emissions requirements due to take effect for trucks serving the ports on January 1, 2014 and an extension of the deadline to coincide with the 2020 deadline for non-port-serving trucks. Trucks manufactured before 2007 would have to be replaced or

upgraded, and shouldering the cost threatens to drive many of the truckers out of business. The drivers are asking for a \$50 per month "green fee" to offset the costs.

They are also demanding to be paid for the extended waiting time they often encounter at the pickup point. The delays between their arrival time and when cargo is loaded can exceed seven hours and exacerbate already demanding and unsafe delivery schedules.

Speaking to KQED TV, driver Herbert Olivares said that while waiting to drop off an empty container on Friday, "I started the line here around 11:50 a.m. and I didn't get out of the terminal until 4:30 in the afternoon." He went on, "Just one box. I didn't get paid for the waiting time." The truckers are asking for a "congestion fee" to offset the hours they spend waiting.

While they wait, truckers are required by security regulations to stay with their trucks at all times, facing fines and possible suspension from the port if they leave their trucks even for a bathroom break. That there is only one bathroom that the truckers are allowed to use was also cited in an open letter, which said that such conditions are "inhumane."

The open letter issued by the truckers notes that SSA's merger of three terminals has resulted in the long wait times and calls for the hiring of more longshoremen to handle the increased workload. SSA Marine closed off two berths even as cargo levels were on the rise. The port serves some 20 carriers, with approximately 74 vessel calls per month. This is likely to increase with Korean shipper Han Jin set to end its association with the Port of Portland and reroute its deliveries to other West Coast ports.

The open letter cites safety concerns not only for the truckers, but also for the outlying neighborhoods, which are exposed to the fumes of the idling trucks.



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