

Dozens of shipping containers fall at Port of Long Beach, attesting to ongoing safety issues in America's second largest port

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On Tuesday, September 9, at least 75 shipping containers fell off the cargo ship, the *Mississippi*, when unloading its cargo at the Port of Long Beach at around 8:48 am (PDT). The *Mississippi*, a Portuguese-flagged container ship operated by ZIM Integrated Shipping Services Ltd., had recently arrived from Yantian, China, delivering 2,412 containers full of clothes, furniture, shoes and electronics.

A “Unified Command” consisting of federal, state and local agencies are currently assisting with the ongoing recovery efforts and investigation.

No major injuries were reported. However, one worker on the *STAX 2*, a clean-air barge designed to capture exhaust emissions from ships, sprained an ankle while fleeing from containers that fell onto the barge he was working on.

The falling containers damaged the smaller *STAX 2*, as it was attached to the *Mississippi* at the time of the incident, leading to a small oil spill from the vessel's 2,000 gallons of renewable diesel.

It is unclear how much fuel was leaked or if the leak came from the generator or fuel tank on board.

“It was a miracle that no one suffered any major injuries,” US Coast Guard Captain Stacey Crecy stated to the press, “especially those individuals who were on the emissions collection barge at the time when the containers fell on top of it.”

Crew sizes vary on clean-air barges, but there are typically two crew members on board at all times—a systems operator and a deckhand—with up to three mariners nearby assisting with port operations.

It is still unclear what caused the containers to topple, but there are a number of factors which could have contributed to this dangerous incident.

It is well known in the shipping industry that parametric rolling motion (PRM) can prove to be dangerous for cargo vessels or Pure Car and Truck Carriers (PCTC), specialized vessels designed to transport vehicles and other wheeled cargo.

PRM occurs when rough weather or sailing conditions causes a container vessel to tilt from side to side, shifting cargo from shipping containers unevenly to one side. The dramatic shift in weight can cause a container stack to become unstable.

Lashing, the practice of securing and attaching containers together through the use of lashing rods, twist locks and chains, can become ineffectual when PRM causes the ship to tilt and roll to extreme angles of 30° to 40° degrees or more.

PRM was one of the major contributing factors for the 2014 *Svendborg Maersk* container vessel incident, where 517 containers fell overboard into the sea and 250 containers were damaged onboard.

The more recent 2020 *ONE Apus* container vessel incident, one of the largest such accidents in history, had 1,816 containers fall overboard into the sea and hundreds more containers damaged. PRM was considered a major factor in this incident as well.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has various guidelines and operational measures in place to assist container vessels with PRM, but with the increased use of larger vessels and container stack heights, these mitigation methods can prove to be ineffective and outdated.

In fact, the World Shipping Council (WSC) released a recent study which showcased that one in ten containers inspected—11.39 percent in 2024 and 11.00 percent in 2023—failed standard safety checks and had serious deficiencies.

These deficiencies typically violate safety, security and regulatory standards and may include improperly declared cargo (i.e., mislabeling dangerous goods), incorrect or missing documentation, damaged containers, improper securing of cargo inside containers, non-compliance with packaging standards and environmental or safety breaches.

The WSC report states that there are currently only seven port countries—the United States, Finland, Canada, the Netherlands, Chile, Germany and South Korea—which share

inspection data with the WSC.

With a little over 4,700 ports operating in 170 countries around the world, the findings of the WSC report cover only a tiny sliver of total worldwide shipping.

The cost of doing business

As of Friday, September 19, 54 out of the 75 containers that fell from the *Mississippi* have been recovered, and the investigation of the incident will take weeks if not months to complete.

“Safety continues to be the highest priority as the Port of Long Beach collaborates with the US Coast Guard, vessel operators, salvage teams and ILWU workers through the next phases of recovery,” said Michael Goldschmidt, the Port of Long Beach’s assistant director of security, in a written statement to the press.

There is no doubt that incidents such as these raise essential questions of workplace safety and management among the working class internationally, but in the eyes of the ruling class, different considerations are taken altogether.

The Port of Long Beach handles more than 9 million 20-foot containers per year from over 2,000 vessels, moving nearly one-fourth of all containers on the West Coast.

The loss of 75 containers out of a pool of over 9 million is negligible when it comes to the profitability of these multi-billion dollar shipping corporations.

According to the class logic of the financial oligarchy, any effort to prevent dangerous accidents such as the one that occurred on the *Mississippi* at the Port of Long Beach would be more costly than allowing these periodic incidents to occur indefinitely.

The very same class logic was applied when it came to the tragic deaths of Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman crushed to death by a gantry crane at a Stellantis plant in Dundee, Michigan, and Brayan Neftali Otoniel Canu Joj, a 19-year-old after-hours sanitation crew member that was crushed to death in an industrial meat grinder at a Tina’s Burritos plant in Vernon, California.

Essential safety protocols such as lockout/tagout (LOTO) procedures were overlooked and ignored in order to speed up production and churn out a higher profit at the cost of workers’ lives.

Other catastrophic events, such as the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse and the Clairton Coke Works plant explosion, followed similar pro-corporate, cost-saving measures which resulted in the preventable deaths and injuries of numerous workers.

According to the class logic of the financial elite, workplace safety and protections are just another overhead expense which must be avoided at all costs, and a worker’s death or injury is considered just another cost of doing business.

What dictates the response of the corporate elite is the fact that the ruling class as a whole is gripped by unprecedented economic and political crises—spearheaded by \$40 trillion of unsustainable debt and worsening trade imbalances—which will compel them to initiate further attacks against the working class in order to offset their decline.

The re-imposition of the most brutal working conditions of an earlier period is a necessary prerequisite to this process.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, “The wiping out of regulations that provided any sort of protection against injury and death in factories, mines, depots, shipyards and other workplaces is a major objective.”

The recent accident at the Port of Long Beach did not result in any immediate loss of life, but unless rank-and-file workers in and around the ports take working conditions and safety into their own hands, it is only a matter of time before an inevitable workplace death takes shape in the foreseeable future.

We call on the establishment of rank-and-file committees to spearhead the fight for workplace safety and control.

This fight cannot be placed within the control of the pro-corporate ILWU union bureaucracy which worked hand in glove with the previous Biden administration to keep West Coast dockworkers working on an expired contract and then pushed through a sellout contract with no improvements on pay or workplace safety.

Only the rank and file with the support of their class brothers and sisters internationally can lead this fight.

To join or build a rank-and-file committee at your workplace, fill out the form below.



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