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A watchmen strike could halt terminals handling 85% of Long Beach cargo on Saturday

The dispute involves about 250 union watchmen, but employers say other dockworkers could honor picket lines and disrupt one-third of Los Angeles cargo

Saturday, November 21, 2026

A strike by port watchmen at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach could begin as early as 12:01 a.m. Pacific time on Saturday, November 21, if a final round of contract talks fails to produce an agreement, raising the risk of cargo disruptions across Southern California's main marine terminals.

The dispute involves the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents terminal operators and shipping lines, and ILWU Local 26, the union representing about 250 watchmen. According to the association, one last bargaining session was scheduled for Friday, November 20, after earlier talks ended with little to no movement from the union on the employers' proposals.

The Pacific Maritime Association said on Wednesday, November 18, that Local 26 had already taken a strike vote and had indicated it would not extend its contract beyond its expiration on Saturday, November 21. The available statements did not say whether the Friday session produced a breakthrough.

While the number of workers directly involved is limited, the potential impact could be much larger. The Pacific Maritime Association warned that thousands of longshore workers, marine clerks and foremen could choose to honor Local 26 picket lines. If that

happens, cargo handling at affected terminals could slow sharply or stop altogether.

The terminals at risk handle a large share of cargo moving through the two ports. The Pacific Maritime Association said the affected facilities account for about 85% of Long Beach cargo and roughly one-third of Los Angeles cargo. That means even a dispute centered on a relatively small bargaining unit could quickly spread through container operations and affect shippers well beyond the waterfront.

The International Association of Movers told its members that household goods shipments and consolidated containers moving through Los Angeles or Long Beach could face significant delays in transit if a strike goes forward. The group urged companies to confirm which terminals their containers are using or are booked through as the labor situation develops.

The risk extends beyond household goods. Any halt or slowdown at the two ports could create added pressure for importers and exporters that depend on reliable West Coast schedules, including companies moving wine, beer and spirits. For beverage businesses, delays at Los Angeles and Long Beach could mean longer transit times, higher storage and trucking costs, and complications for time-sensitive deliveries tied to retail and restaurant demand.

That exposure is especially important for companies that rely on Southern California gateways for inbound imports or outbound shipments. Even if cargo is eventually rerouted or released after a short disruption, the immediate effect can include missed vessel windows, terminal congestion and higher logistics costs throughout the supply chain.

The labor dispute also shows how vulnerable port operations can be when a small group of workers occupies a role that touches broader terminal activity. Watchmen are not the largest unit on the docks, but the Pacific Maritime Association has argued that a picket line by Local 26 could draw support from other unionized workers and effectively freeze operations at multiple terminals.

Neither side’s full negotiating positions were detailed in the statements made public before the contract deadline. What was clear from the employers’ account is that negotiations remained unsettled late in the week and that the union had not agreed to

another extension. Unless a deal was reached in the final bargaining push, terminals in Los Angeles and Long Beach were facing the possibility of a work stoppage at the start of Saturday, November 21.