# Strikes at Amazon raise concerns for holiday supply chains



Recent developments concerning strike activities at Amazon warehouses have highlighted significant supply chain challenges for companies as the holiday season approaches. Reports from CNBC indicate that these labour disputes are part of a broader trend of supply-chain disruptions that have characterised 2024 and are anticipated to linger into the future. The Teamsters union is actively mobilising members to prepare for potential strikes, particularly as dock workers at 36 ports along the U.S. East and Gulf Coast are set to negotiate their working conditions.

Mike Short, president of global forwarding at C.H. Robinson, noted a dramatic increase in industrial action, with a 280 per cent rise in strike activities recorded in 2023 compared to previous years. The organisation is advising shippers to brace for a possible port strike as early as January. This situation is particularly precarious for industries reliant on just-in-time inventory systems, such as automotive and pharmaceuticals, necessitating the implementation of contingency plans in anticipation of further labour unrest.

The looming deadline of January 15, when negotiations regarding automation at the East and Gulf Coast ports are expected to reach a conclusion, adds urgency to the situation. Talks between U.S. ports and the International Longshoremen’s Association have reportedly stalled, and with President-elect Donald Trump signalling support for the union's stance against port automation, the potential for significant labour disruptions by mid-January is increasingly plausible.

Maersk, a leading figure in global shipping, has advised clients to proactively move containers off terminals to circumvent disruptions and ensure access to cargo in the event of terminal closures. The logistics sector is still recovering from the unpredictable impacts of COVID-19, which has reshaped global supply chains and necessitated the adoption of digital solutions to enhance trade monitoring and communication.

In this context, Andrew Petrisin, deputy assistant secretary for Multimodal Freight at the U.S. Department of Transportation, has highlighted the development of Freight Logistics Optimization Works (FLOW), a digital supply chain monitoring platform created in 2022. This platform, which collaborates with 86 partners, offers a detailed overview of trade operations, helping to track trends and uncover supply chain vulnerabilities.

Currently, FLOW monitors approximately 75 per cent of U.S. container imports and 80 per cent of terminal capacity, involving major logistics providers, retailers, and carriers. This capability allows for real-time responses to shifts in cargo flow or port congestion, reacting to unforeseen events such as the recent collapse of the Baltimore Bridge.

Petrisin views FLOW as a critical tool for mitigating disruptions, providing users with insights that facilitate informed decisions regarding inventory management and cargo movement during periods of congestion. Although he is set to transition from his role with the Department of Transportation when the Trump administration commences, Petrisin asserts the ongoing significance of FLOW for transportation logistics.

While the strikes at Amazon fall outside the direct purview of his department, Petrisin has articulated the office’s commitment to maintaining the competitiveness of U.S. ports and ensuring fair compensation for workers. The future trajectory of FLOW and the potential for public-private partnerships in transportation funding appear to enjoy bipartisan support, setting the stage for enhancements in freight transportation efficiency as the country moves forward.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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