



Blanked Sailings Have Truckers Playing Port Whack-a-Mole

Increased blanked sailings at southern ports have put bulk liquid shippers and their trucking partners in a precarious situation. With CMA CGM temporarily cancelling five services to Houston and multiple carriers agreeing to avoid Savannah altogether, who knows where a vessel prepared to handle exports may pop up?

Blanked sailings can be a serious operational issue for some shippers because many of the omissions are very short notice. If a trucking partner delivers export cargo on schedule to the Port of Houston and then the vessel supposed to pick up that cargo skips the port, that cargo is stuck waiting for the next available ship. Not only does that cause a direct delay, but based on specific order agreements, paperwork may need to be resubmitted and space may need to be re-secured on the upcoming vessel.

One strategy to combat these delays is to proactively avoid these omissions as much as possible. Logistical experts take into account the most updated market data as well as information from carriers they collaborate with to pinpoint regional calls that will not be omitted. Then, they can be sure to send fully stocked trucks to that port and cargo can be loaded onto the calling vessel. It may add slight delay on the front-end depending on that port's distance from the bulk liquid manufacturer or distribution center, but it'll eliminate more serious delays regarding skipped ports. The only downside is, this strategy can have truckers chasing ship rotations across the southern US.

"The vast majority of our business consists of exports from Houston and a select few neighboring ports around our region down to the west coast of South America," explains Lynn Stacy, Managing Director of OEC Group's Liquid Logistics Division. "These blanked sailings aren't doing us any favors. We've had to be proactive, communicate with carriers, communicate with our trucking partners, and generally do our best to stay ahead of these omissions. Our shipments need to be on the right rotations that'll get cargo to destination ports in South America as quickly as possible. The team is operating as efficiently as possible under these conditions, and it has been an exciting challenge."