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## Shippers'NewsWire

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### Seaway workers near strike deadline

Workers who operate Canadian locks on the St. Lawrence Seaway have authorized their union to strike on 72 hours' notice at any time after Oct. 10 if a new contract is not reached.

The workers, who belong to Canadian Autoworkers Union, operate 13 of the 19 locks on the Seaway -- five between Montreal and Lake Ontario as well as the eight locks in the Welland Canal. U.S. workers operate two locks between Montreal and Ontario as well as four locks at Sault Ste. Marie on the St. Mary's Falls Canal that links Lake Huron to Lake Superior.

The canal is run jointly by the U.S. Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corp. and the Canadian St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp. (SLSMC).

The Canadian agency is optimistic that a strike can be avoided. Andrew Bogora, communications officer for the Canadian management corporation, said negotiations are to resume Monday.

But if a strike did occur, he said it would completely halt movement of "salties" in and out of Lake Ontario as well as ships using the Welland Canal to move between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

Ships operating on the Upper Lakes, such as the carriers that bring iron ore from the Mesabi Range to steel mills along Lake Michigan and Lake Erie, would not be disrupted by a strike.

It appears that some oceangoing freighters may have left Great Lakes for fear of being stranded if the locks are shut down or have delayed voyages to the region because of the uncertainty raised by the potential strike. Bogora said while there are normally about 30 international ships on the lakes at this time of year, currently there are only about 18 vessels.

Michael Broad, president of the Shipping Federation of Canada, said some ships have decided not to load cargo for the lakes. But he said vessels that are inbound with cargo are proceeding to their destinations because they have contracts to fulfill and because there is no certainty that a strike will occur.

Represented by the CAW, the workers have been without a contract since April 1 as they duel over the Seaway's bid to modernize its operations.

"Given that the SLSMC must apply new technology to ensure that marine transportation remains competitive in an era of fierce competition within the transportation sector, changes are being sought to certain clauses in the collective agreement," the Canadian corporation said. "The union is well aware that the key objective of the corporation is to secure flexibility surrounding work rules and technological change -- the first fundamental change in work methods during the 50-year life of the Seaway."

SLSMC said it was "confident that a satisfactory resolution to these matters can be found at the bargaining table, and looks forward to a resumption of negotiations on Oct. 6.

"In the meantime, the corporation is preparing contingency plans to ensure an orderly shutdown of the system in the event that an agreement cannot be reached, and will begin communicating these plans to its customers and employees immediately," it added.

— Chris Dupin