

Glossary of Maritime Terms

ABS – The American Bureau of Shipping is a U.S. classification society that certifies if a ship is in compliance with standard rules of construction and maintenance.

apron – The area immediately in front of or behind a wharf shed on which cargo is lifted. On the “front apron,” cargo is unloaded from or loaded onto a ship. Behind the shed, cargo moves over the “rear apron” into and out of railroad cars.

barge – A large, flat-bottomed vessel (container) used to carry cargo— often from deep-water ports – via shallow-draft waterways.

berth – (verb) To bring a ship to a berth. (noun) The space at a wharf at which a ship docks.

Bill of Lading – A contract between a shipper (manufacturer) and transport carrier listing the terms for moving freight between specified points.

bonded warehouse – A building designated by Customs authorities for storage of goods without payment of duties to Customs until goods are removed.

Board of Commissioners – The members of the governing board of the port authority are called commissioners. The Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans sets policies for the operation and management of the port. The Board is comprised of seven members from the St. Bernard, Orleans and Jefferson tri-parish area.

box – The nickname for a container

breakbulk cargo – non-containerized cargo that is loose or stored in steel boxes, bales, pallets, drums or other units to be loaded onto or discharged from ships or other transport. (See also: bulk and container)

bulk cargo – Loose cargo (dry or liquid) that is loaded in volume directly into a ship’s hold; e.g., grain, coal, oats, oil, or fuel.

bulk terminal – a facility at which bulk goods are stored and handled.

bunkering – Ships receive fuel from bunkering operations either at a fuel dock or from a bunker barge tied alongside the ship at its berth.

cabotage – Shipment of cargo between a nation’s ports is called coastwise trade. The U.S. and some other countries require such trade to be carried on domestic ships only.

captive cargo port – When most of a port's inbound cargoes are being shipped short distances and most of its export products come from nearby areas, the port is called a captive cargo port. Houston, for example, has a huge population and manufacturing base to draw from between Dallas, San Antonio and its own metropolitan area. (Contrast with a transit port.)

cargo – The freight (goods, products) carried by a ship, barge, train, truck or plane.

cartage – Originally the process of transporting by cart. Today, the term is used for trucking or trucking fees.

chandlers – Like a hotel at sea, a ship needs many supplies to operate and serve their crews – groceries, paper products, engine parts, electronics, hardware, etc. A Chandler sells these supplies to the ship's agent.

channels of distribution – The routes by which products are transported from origin to destination. This includes the physical routes, as well as the different companies involved in ultimately delivering the goods to buyers.

checkers – See clerks, below.

chock – A piece of wood or other material put next to cargo to prevent it from shifting.

civil service – Some U.S., state, city and parish government jobs are protected under civil service systems which are designed to provide a degree of security to employees and to deter nepotism, political patronage and arbitrary treatment of workers.

clerks – A person who checks the actual count of the goods as they are being unloaded from a ship. The goods can be steel boxes, drums, bundles, etc.

COFC – Container on a flatcar.

common carrier – Trucking, railroad or barge lines that are licensed to transport goods nationwide.

consignment – a shipment of goods. The buyer of this shipment is called the consignee; the seller of the goods is called the consignor.

consolidator – The person or firm that consolidates (combines) cargo from a number of shippers into a container that will deliver the goods to several buyers.

consular corps – The group of foreign consul generals or honorary consuls who represent the interests of their government (its citizens and businesses) within a region of the United States. They issue visas and diplomatic documents and answer to their embassies in Washington, D.C.

container – A box made of steel used to transport cargo by ship, rail, truck or barge. Also referred to as steel boxes.

container freight station – The facility for stuffing and stripping a container of its cargo, especially for movement by railroad.

containerization – Although most general cargo ships carry containers along with other cargoes, full containerships have permanent container cells and rarely carry non-containerized goods.

contraband – Products prohibited in trade such as weapons going to the Middle East or drugs from South America smuggled to the U.S.

Corps of Engineers – This department of the U.S. Army is responsible for flood protection and providing safe navigation channels. The Corps built and maintains the levees, flood walls and spillways that keep the Mississippi River out of low lying communities. The Corps is vital to keeping the Mississippi River open by dredging silt that accumulates in the passes to the Gulf of Mexico.

craft – A boat, ship or airplane.

crane – a gigantic machine for lifting, shifting and lowering heavy weights by means of a projecting swinging arm or with the hoisting apparatus supported on an overhead or ground track.

customs – A duty or tax on imported goods.

customs brokers – a person who prepares the needed documentation for importing goods (just as a freight forwarder does for exports). The broker is licensed by the U. S. Treasury Department to clear goods through U. S. Customs.

United States **Customs Department** – a federal agency whose mission is to prevent the importation of illegal drugs and contraband to the U.S.

deadhead – When a truck returning from a delivery has no return freight on the back haul.

deck barge – Transports heavy or oversize cargoes mounted on its top deck instead of inside a hold. Machinery, appliances, project cargoes and even recreational vehicles move on deck barges.

demurrage – A penalty fee assessed when cargo isn't moved off a wharf before the (30 day) free time allowance ends.

dock (verb) – To bring in a vessel to tie up at a wharf berth. (You park a car, but dock a ship).

dock (noun) – A waterside area at which ships are tied.

dockage – A charge by the Port authority for the length of waterfrontage used by a vessel tied up at a wharf.

double stack – A way of transporting containers by rail with one container stacked atop another.

drayage – Transport by truck for short distances (Example: from wharf to warehouse).

dredge (noun) – A vessel with hydraulic equipment that removes unwanted silt accumulations from the bottom of a waterway.

dredge (verb) – The process of churning up the silt and pumping it into deeper water to allow deep draft vessels to sail or berth smoothly.

dunnage – Wood or other material used in stowing cargo to prevent its movement during a voyage.

drumming – The packaging of liquid cargoes into drums, usually with a 55-gallon capacity.

duty – A government tax on imported merchandise.

elevator – A complex including storage facilities, computerized loading; inspection rooms and docks to load and unload dry bulk cargo such as grain or green coffee.

export packers – Firms that securely pack export products into a container or crate to protect the cargo from damage during an ocean voyage.

fender piles – The wooden or plastic pilings on the outer edge of the wharf that function like the fenders on a car. They absorb the shock of a ship as it docks at the wharf and to protect the structural pilings that actually support the wharf.

fleeting – The area at which barges, towboats and tugs are berth until needed. The operation of building or dismantling barge tows.

foreign trade zone – Known in some countries as a free zone, a foreign trade zone (FTZ) is a site within the USA (in or near a U.S. Customs port of entry) where foreign and domestic goods are held until they are ready to be released into international commerce.

freight consolidator – A company which receives a shipper's cargo from different locations and consolidates those shipments into containers. The firm may also combine goods from several shippers into a container to lower individual freight costs.

freight forwarder – An individual or company that prepares the documentation and coordinates the movement or export cargoes. See also custom broker.

general cargo – Consists of both containerized and breakbulk goods, in contrast to bulk cargo. See breakbulk, container, bulk). General cargo operations produces more jobs than bulk handling.

grain elevator – The facility at which bulk grain is unloaded, weighed, cleaned, blended and exported. There are 10 grain elevators between Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and the Gulf of Mexico. Annually, they handle about 60 percent of all U.S. grain exports.

GIWW – Gulf Intracoastal Waterway is a barge channel extending from Brownsville, Texas, to St. Marks, Florida. This inland channel protects barges and small craft from high seas.

HAZ MAT – The abbreviation for hazardous materials.

heavy hauler – A truck specially-equipped to transport unusually heavy cargoes (steel slabs, bulldozers, transformers, boats, heavy machinery, etc.)

heavy lift – very large and heavy cargoes that require specialized equipment to move the products to and from ship, truck, rail, barge and terminals; Also called “project cargo.”

homeport – A port from which a cruiseship loads passengers and begins its itinerary and to which it returns to disembark passengers at the end of the voyage; Also called an “embarkation port” or a “turnaround port.”

ILA – Abbreviation for International Longshoremen’s Association. See labor unions and longshoremen.

Industrial Canal – The common name for the 5.5-mile long, Inner Harbor Navigation Canal, which links the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. It also provides the link to the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) which was closed permanently in Spring 2009, and the eastbound connection to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway.

intermodal shipment – When more than one mode of transportation is used to ship cargo from origin to destination.

IMX – This is transportation shorthand for intermodal exchange. In an IMX yard, containers can be lifted from truck chassis to rail intermodal cars or vice versa.

JIT – The abbreviation for “Just in time,” which is a way to minimize warehousing costs by having cargo shipped to arrive just in time for its use. The inventory control method depends on extremely reliable transportation.

labor union – An organization of workers formed to serve members’ collective interests with regard to wages and working conditions.

landlord port – A port authority that builds wharves, which it then rents or leases to a terminal operator, usually a stevedoring company. The Port of New Orleans is a landlord port.

Lash – These 900-foot long ships carry small barges inside the vessel. LASH stands for Lighter Aboard Ship. Just as cargo is transported by barge from the shallower parts of the Mississippi River to the Port of New Orleans for export aboard ocean-going ships, LASH barges are lifted into these specialized ships. Overseas, the ship can discharge clusters of barges in the open waters. Then several towboats will assemble the barges into tows bound for various ports and inland waterways, without the ship having to spend time traveling to each port.

LASH barge – These small barges measure 61'5" by 31'2" wide and have a 13 foot draft. Each can hold 430 short (390 metric) tons. They may be used to transport forest products, grain, steel or other cargoes.

launch service – Companies that offer "water-taxi" service to ships at anchorage.

LCL – The acronym for "less than containerload." It refers to a partial container load that is usually consolidated with other goods to fill a container.

LTL – A shipment that is "less than truckload." Usually LTL cargoes from different sources are consolidated to save costs.

longshoremen – Dock workers who load and unload ships; also called stevedores.

manifest – The ship captain's list of individual goods that make up the ship's cargo.

master – The officer in charge of the ship. "Captain" is a courtesy title often given to a master.

marine surveyor – A person who inspects a ship hull or its cargo for damage or quality.

maritime – (adjective) Located on or near the sea; commerce or navigation by sea. The maritime industry includes people working for transportation (ship, rail, truck and towboat/barge) companies, freight forwarders and customs brokers; stevedoring companies; labor unions; chandlers; warehouses; ship building and repair firms; importers/exporters; pilot associations, port authorities, etc.

marshaling yard – A container "parking lot," where containers are stored in a precise order according to the ship loading plan.

midstream operator – A company that transfers bulk cargo from one vessel anchored in midstream to another, rather than along shore. Grain and coal are sometimes handled this way.

mooring dolphin – A cluster of pilings to which a boat or barge ties up.

MRGO – The Mississippi River- Gulf Outlet is a man-made channel extending from the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal and Gulf Intracoastal Waterway to the Gulf of Mexico. It was closed in early 2009, blamed in part for damage to levees and flooding parts of the city of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.

NVOCC – A non-vessel-owning common carrier buys space aboard a ship to get a lower volume rate. An NVOCC then sells that space to various small shippers, consolidates their freight, issues bills of lading and books space aboard ship.

ocean carrier – Diesel-fueled vessels that has long replaced steamships of the past. The person who represents the ship in port is often called a steamship agent.

ocean carrier agent – See steamship agent.

pallet – A short wooden platform on which packaged cargo is placed, then handled by a forklift truck.

pier – A structure, which juts out into a waterway from the shore, for mooring vessels and cargo handling. (See also quay).

piggyback – A rail transport mode where a loaded truck trailer is shipped on a rail flatcar.

pilot – A licensed navigation guide with thorough knowledge of a particular section of a waterway. For example, when any ship enters the Mississippi river it must take local pilots aboard to advise the captain and navigator of local conditions (difficult currents; hidden wrecks, etc.) along certain stretches of the river. Usually a pilot advises the navigator, but he may sometimes take the wheel himself.

Plimsoll mark – The symbol at the center of the hull that indicates the safe loading level for that ship under various conditions. The horizontal marks represent levels for saltwater versus fresh, winter versus tropical.

port – A harbor area where ships are docked and for the agency (port authority) which administers use of public wharves and port properties.

port-of-call – Port at which a cargo ship or cruise ship calls (makes a stop) on its itinerary. A cruise ship's visit at a port-of-call may last from five hours to 24 hours. (See also homeport.)

project cargo – Oversized or obscured-sized materials and equipment that cannot easily fit in a container, and requires assembly for a special project. For example, a company exported from the Port of New Orleans all the construction machinery and supplies to build a highway in Turkey. Project cargo is also called heavy lift.

quay – A wharf which parallels the waterline. Wharves in the Port of New Orleans are quays, not piers.

range top – Slang for an open-top container covered with a tarpaulin.

refer – A refrigerated container for transporting frozen foods (meat, ice cream, fruit, etc.)

ro/ro – Short for roll on/roll off. A ro/ro ship is designed with ramps that can be lowered to the dock so cars, buses, trucks or other vehicles can drive into the belly of the ship, rather than be lifted aboard. A ro/ro ship, like a container ship, has a quick turnaround time of about 12 hours.

shedage – Regardless of the length of stay, a vessel is charged a one-time fee for use of shed space and/or marginal (waterside) rail track space. The charge is based on the length of a vessel.

spreader – a device for lifting containers by their corner posts. The spreader bar on a container crane is telescope to allow lifting various length containers.

steamship – Ships that transport cargo overseas are powered by diesel fuel instead of steam.

steamship agent – The local representative who acts as liaison among shipowners, local port authorities, terminals and supply/service companies. An agent handles all details for getting the ship into port; having it unloaded, loaded; inspected and out to sea quickly.

steamship company – A business that owns ships (ocean carriers) which operate in international trade.

steamship line – A steamship (ocean carrier) service running on a particular international route. For example: a shipping company that has a line operating between the Middle East/Indian subcontinent/Far East and the U.S. Gulf.

stevedores – Labor management companies that provide equipment and hire workers to transfer cargo between ships and docks. Also known as terminal operators.

stripping – Unloading a container.

stuffing – loading cargo into a container.

tank barges – Used for transporting bulk liquids such as petroleum, chemicals, molasses, vegetable oils and liquefied gases.

tariff – Fees imposed by a government on the import/export of goods; also, the rates and rules of transportation company as listed in published industry tables.

terminal – The place where cargo is handled. Also known as wharf.

terminal operator – The company that operates cargo handling activities on a wharf.

TOFC – Trailer on a flatcar. Same as piggyback.

towboat – A snub-nosed boat with push knees used for pushing barges.

tractor-trailer – a large truck with 18 wheels that carry cargo on the highway. Also called 18-wheeler.

tramp – A ship operating with no fixed route or published schedule.

transit port – A port whose cargo moves through its port to destinations outside its local market to be consumed.

transit shed – An overhead storage building/structure designed to protect cargoes from weather damage and is used only for short-term storage.

transshipment – The unloading of cargo at a port or point where it is then reloaded, sometimes into another mode of transportation for transfer to a final destination.

trucks – Heavy automotive vehicles used to transport cargo.

tugboat – Strong v-hull shaped boat used for maneuvering ships into and out of port and to carry supplies. A ship is too powerful to pull up to the wharf on its own. It cuts power and lets the tug nudge it in. Tugboats may be used to deliver supplies and sometimes help to corral a runaway ship. Generally, barges are pushed by **towboats**, not tugs.

turnaround – The amount of time it takes between a vessel's arrival and departure.

twist locks – The four pointed locking devices on the corners of a spreader or a chassis to lift or secure a box.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – See Corp of Engineers.

U.S. Customs – See customs

vessel – A ship or large boat.

warehouse – A place in which goods or merchandise is stored.

wharf – The place at which ships tie up to unload and load cargo. The wharf typically has front and rear loading docks (aprons), a transit shed, open (unshedded) storage areas, truck bays, and rail tracks.

wharfage – A charge assessed by a pier or wharf owner for handling incoming or outgoing cargo.