

Gulf Coast ports record varied results in November volumes

Houston sees TEU declines, New Orleans and Corpus Christi report gains in exports

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The Port of Corpus Christi reported a 1% year-over-year increase in crude oil shipments during November. (Photo: Port of Corpus Christi)

Ports in both New Orleans and Corpus Christi, Texas, saw freight flow increases in November as shipments of crude oil and plastics continued to be in demand across the global market. Port Houston saw declines in container volume during the month.

Port Houston sees 15% decline in container volume

[Port Houston](#) saw decreased container volumes in November, recording a 15% year-over-year (y/y) decline to 297,622 twenty-foot equivalent units.

Imports of steel declined 16% y/y in November to 266,955 tons. Steel imports were down 14% at 4 million tons in the first 11 months of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

Roger Guenther, the port's executive director, said while overall TEUs and steel imports are down this year compared to 2022, he considers 2023 a successful year for the port.

"We're winding down another year, another strong year, steady in 2023. Compared to three years ago, it's a very, very strong year," Guenther said during the Dec. 12 port commission meeting. "There's been some decreases in things like grain and plywood that were coming in last year."

Total import tonnage was down 19% y/y to 2.1 million tons, while export tonnage was down 13% y/y to 2.3 million tons.

"Steel, we know that's cyclical, we had a heavy year last year, but it's still a very strong year in terms of average volume that we handle on steel," Guenther said. "Overall for the year, imports are down about 8% or 9%, but our exports, loaded containers, the resin chemicals, the things that we export, agricultural goods, are up 8% for the year."

Guenther also said the port's volume of empty container exports was down about 20% for the year.

Empty container exports plunged 41% y/y in November to 35,239 TEUs, while imports of empty containers rose 25% y/y to 8,356 TEUs.

Loaded exports in November fell 2% y/y to 116,396 TEUs. Loaded imports fell 16% y/y in November at 137,631 TEUs.

Ship calls for November were up 4% y/y to 678 vessels. Barges calling Port Houston increased 7% y/y to 262.

"Overall, it's a great year on loaded cargo moving and still delivering good service levels to our customers," Guenther said.

Plastic resins, chemicals and coffee boost container volumes at Port of New Orleans

[The Port of New Orleans](#) saw a 32% y/y increase in container volumes in November, recording 40,651 TEUs.

Containerized shipments were led by exports of plastic resins and miscellaneous chemicals, as well as imports of coffee and organic chemicals.

Total breakbulk tonnage for the month was 40,553 short tons, compared to 158,995 short tons in November 2022, representing a 74% y/y decrease. Port officials said steel was the top breakbulk commodity for the month.

Container volumes year to date in New Orleans are up by 11.5 % compared to the same period last year.

"Our top export commodity, plastics, has double-digit growth year to date," port spokeswoman Kimberly Curth told FreightWaves. "Calendar year to date, we have seen 89 more vessel calls than last year, representing a 32% increase year over year in our weekly service vessel calls."

The port handled 8,729 Class I rail car switches in November, a 27% y/y decrease. The port handles switching operations for the six Class I railroads that operate in New Orleans: BNSF Railway, CN, CSX, Kansas City Southern, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific.

Crude oil demand helps Corpus Christi see gains in November

[The Port of Corpus Christi](#) saw a 1% y/y increase in total cargo to 16.1 million tons in November, led by exports of crude oil.

The port handled 10.1 million total tons of crude oil during the month, a 1% increase compared to the same year-ago period. Exports of crude oil for November topped 9.4 million tons, just a 0.1% increase over last year.

Shipments of petroleum totaled 4.8 million tons during November, an 8% y/y decrease. Exports of petroleum were at 3.79 million tons for the month, a 7% y/y decline.

Dry bulk cargo increased 58% y/y to 644,870 tons in November, while bulk grain shipments rose 246% y/y to 272,408 tons.

Liquid bulk shipments rose 200% y/y to 60,886 tons. Breakbulk cargo rose 293% y/y to 27,577 in November.

The Port of Corpus Christi had 624 ship calls in November, a 2.6% y/y increase from 2022, including 440 barges and 184 ships.