

Retail Container Traffic Ends 2½ Years of Downturns, Shows Gains through Mid-2010

WASHINGTON, January 11, 2010 – Import cargo volume at the nation’s major retail container ports ended a nearly two-and-a-half-year streak of year-over-year declines in December and is on track to show gains through the first half of 2010, according to the monthly Global Port Tracker report released today by the National Retail Federation and Hackett Associates.

“These numbers are a clear sign that retailers are optimistic about 2010,” NRF Vice President for Supply Chain and Customs Policy Jonathan Gold said. “Retailers are still going to be cautious with their inventories, but we wouldn’t see these increases in imports if stores weren’t expecting sales to improve. It’s been a long time since we’ve seen year-over-year volume go up, so this is definitely good news.”

U.S. ports handled 1.09 million Twenty-foot Equivalent Units in November, the latest month for which actual numbers are available. That was down 8 percent from October, traditionally the busiest month of the year, and 10 percent from November 2008. One TEU is one 20-foot container or its equivalent.

The November number marked the 28th month in a row to show a decrease from the same month a year earlier. But the trend was broken in December, which was estimated at 1.08 million TEU, down slightly from November as the holiday season came to a close but a 1.7 percent increase over December 2008.

Year-over-year increases are expected to continue through the remainder of Global Port Tracker’s six-month forecast range. January is forecast at 1.15 million TEU, a 9 percent increase over January 2009, and February, traditionally the slowest month of the year, is forecast at 1.05 million TEU, up 25 percent from the previous year. March is forecast at 1.16 million TEU, up 21 percent as retailers begin to stock up for spring and summer, April at 1.19 million TEU, up 20 percent, and May at 1.2 million TEU, up 15 percent.

While final data won’t be available until next month, the report estimates that 2009 ended with a total volume of 12.7 million TEU, down 17 percent from 2008’s 15.2 million TEU and the lowest since the 12.5 million TEU reported in 2003.

“The U.S. economy is experiencing positive growth, with imports on the rise as a result of re-stocking and a rising consumer demand,” Hackett Associates founder Ben Hackett said. “Consumer sentiment remains cautious, however.”

Global Port Tracker, which is produced for NRF by the consulting firm Hackett Associates, covers the U.S. ports of Long Angeles/Long Beach, Oakland, Seattle and Tacoma on the West Coast; New York/New Jersey, Hampton Roads, Charleston and Savannah on the East Coast, and Houston on the Gulf Coast. The report is free to NRF retail members, and subscription information is available at www.nrf.com/PortTracker or by calling (202) 783-7971. Subscription information for non-members can be found at www.globalporttracker.com.

The National Retail Federation is the world's largest retail trade association, with membership that comprises all retail formats and channels of distribution including department, specialty, discount, catalog, Internet, independent stores, chain restaurants, drug stores and grocery stores as well as the industry's key trading partners of retail goods and services. NRF represents an industry with more than 1.6 million U.S. retail establishments, more than 24 million employees - about one in five American workers - and 2008 sales of \$4.6 trillion. As the industry umbrella group, NRF also represents more than 100 state, national and international retail associations. www.nrf.com.

Hackett Associates provides expert consulting, research and advisory services to the international maritime industry, government agencies and international institutions.