Retail Container Traffic to be Up 25 Percent in First Half of 2010

WASHINGTON, February 8, 2010 – Import cargo volume at the nation's major retail container ports will be a full 25 percent higher during the first half of 2010 compared with the same period a year ago, according to the monthly Global Port Tracker report released today by the National Retail Federation and Hackett Associates.

"This is a dramatic turnaround over what we've seen during the past two years," NRF Vice President for Supply Chain and Customs Policy Jonathan Gold said. "Increases in import volumes don't correspond directly with dollar volumes in sales, so caution has to be exercised when looking at these numbers. But retailers are clearly expecting to move more merchandise this year."

U.S. ports handled 1.09 million Twenty-foot Equivalent Units in December, the latest month for which actual numbers are available. That was unchanged from November but up 2.6 percent from December 2008 to break a 28-month streak during which monthly totals were lower than the same month the year before. One TEU is one 20-foot cargo container or its equivalent.

January was estimated at 1.19 million TEU, a 17 percent increase over January 2009, and February, traditionally the slowest month of the year, is forecast at 1.1 million TEU, up 30 percent from the previous year. March is forecast at 1.18 million TEU, up 23 percent as retailers begin to stock up for spring and summer, April at 1.25 million TEU, up 27 percent, May at 1.3 million TEU, up 26 percent, and June at 1.38 million TEU, up 36 percent.

Those monthly numbers would put the first half of 2010 at 7.4 million TEU, up 25 percent from last year's 5.9 million TEU.

With numbers from December now final, 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.

Hackett Associates founder Ben Hackett disagreed with economists who fear that the economy is in the middle of a W-shaped recovery where another dip could follow current signs of an upturn.

"This forecast assumes that we are not in a double-dip recession and that a recovery is underway," Hackett said. "Although 2009 saw decreased import activity levels, the forecast for 2010 points towards growth."

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 atwww.globalportracker.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.