

Port bracing for Chinese cargo tsunami

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The Port of Vancouver is bracing for a major increase in cargo arrivals from China next year as changing trade rules will almost certainly stimulate ever-heavier traffic from Asia to docks all along the continent's west coast.

To deal with rapidly increasing container volumes, port executives believe round-the-clock trucking and warehouse operations will soon become essential.

Chris Badger, vice-president of customer development and operations, said on Friday that the port and its stakeholders are preparing to announce changes next year to improve the flow of goods through the booming port.

The need was described as "urgent" earlier this week by TSI Terminal Systems Inc. president-CEO Norman Stark in a presentation to the Vancouver Board of Trade.

Ships and railcars are loaded and unloaded on a 24-hour basis, whereas container trucking remains restricted to daytime, and until only recently, was confined to weekdays.

To the south, U.S. west-coast ports face what the Los Angeles Times called a "cargo tsunami" after Jan. 1.

That's when the World Trade Organization lifts quotas on clothing and textile exports to North America from China, India and 38 other nations.

Badger said Port of Vancouver stakeholders are looking at extending trucking and warehouse shipping/receiving operations from an eight-hour day to "eventually" a 24-hour day.

"Everybody knows something has to be done. There is no disagreement on that. I think we will see some changes happening in the next few months," he said.

"You gain the most efficiency from any infrastructure when you use it 24 hours a day, be it a road, a rail or any other parts of the process."