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Truckers at Los Angeles Port Vote to Unionize

Short-haul truckers employed by Eco Flow in the Los Angeles and Long Beach port complexes voted unanimously to unionize, but the Teamsters still face an uphill battle to organize the wider labor pool.



Truckers wait to unload their cargo at the Port of Los Angeles *PHOTO: BLOOMBERG NEWS*

By
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LOS ANGELES—A group of truck drivers at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach voted late Wednesday to join the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, becoming the fourth company at the port to unionize at a time when many say port trucking is ripe for a shake-up.

In the \$12 billion niche industry known as drayage trucking, short-haul drivers transport containers between ports and nearby rail yards and warehouses. For decades, most drayage drivers—who number more than 10,000 at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach—have been independent contractors who own their own trucks. But as ports have grown more congested amid a general trucker shortage, [an opening emerged for companies](#) that purchase trucks and hire full-time drivers.

The 88 drivers who unionized this week work for Eco Flow Transportation LLC, which launched earlier this year with funding from a private equity firm. The unanimous unionization vote, which was expected, brings the total number of drayage Teamsters in the Los Angeles and Long Beach region to roughly 450.

Still, many truckers say they'd rather remain independent. Weston LaBar, executive director of the Harbor Trucking Association, an industry group of about 100 port trucking companies, says while there may be a "shift in proportions" among companies that hire full-time drivers and those that contract with independent ones, he doesn't see unionized drayage firms becoming the norm.

Mr. LaBar said that some trucking companies have raised their rates and compensate their drivers for wait time as ports become more congested.

Nick Weiner, the port campaign director for the Teamsters, said the union's efforts won't stop with Eco Flow. The union has worked for years to organize this labor force.

"We're in it for the long haul," Mr. Weiner said. "We very much want to send the message to other companies that new employee model, and working with the Teamsters, can benefit them."