

Ice Slows Down St. Pete Cargo Shipping

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Because of the ice coating the Gulf of Finland, the growth rate of cargo turnover in St. Petersburg's port has fallen, and dockworkers have received about \$10 million less than they could have, shipping experts said.

In St. Petersburg's main port, cargo turnover — a measure of the amount of freight versus the distance it travels — fell 11 percent in March versus the same month last year, the port's administration said.

That's a new trend. In February, cargo turnover, also known as freight turnover, rose 8 percent in comparison with February 2010. For the overall first quarter, cargo turnover grew 5 percent compared with the same period last year. That first-quarter increase meant a cargo turnover of 11.8 million tons, the port's administration said in a report.

Dockworkers belonging to Sea Port St. Petersburg reduced the transfer of freight by 14 percent in the first quarter because of the difficult situation with the ice, a company representative said, decreasing it to 2.2 million tons.

The leading three dockworker companies, which are part of the group, transferred 64 percent less fertilizer material and 86 percent less coal versus the first quarter of 2010.

About 400,000 tons of cargo accumulated in the group's warehouses, and the companies will gradually send out the goods to the cargo recipients, a group spokesperson said.

The biggest port in St. Petersburg, the First Container Terminal, or PKT, increased its processing of containers by just 0.3 percent in the first three months of this year. The processing decreased by 12.1 percent in March versus the year-earlier period, said a spokesman for National Container Company, which is owned by PKT.

Without the ice, the total growth for the first three months of the year could have been up to 10 percent, the spokesman estimated.

The second-leading container terminal, Petrosport, has built up its cargo turnover by 98 percent, a Global Ports representative said. January's year-on-year growth was 160 percent, February's was 110 percent and March's was only 55 percent, the press service for Global Ports said.

Ice with a thickness of more than a meter began to impede the movement of ships in the Gulf of Finland in mid-February. By the mid-March, after a thawing and freezing, the queue of expected calls at the port reached 160, according to the port's administration. By Friday morning, that figure was only 14.

The shipping schedules for maritime shipping lines were thrown off in the second half of March, and deliveries of containers were delayed by two weeks to three weeks, said Dmitry Vasilyev, chief executive of logistics company Grimex Trade & Logistics. He said that just in the port of Hamburg alone, more than 30,000 containers headed to St. Petersburg have accumulated over the past two months.

Delivery of those containers may wait until mid or late May, confirmed an employee of a foreign shipping company that calls at the St. Petersburg port.

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