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Global shipping crisis aggravating the environmental crisis

by LEANDRA BERNSTEIN | Sinclair Broadcast Group | Tuesday, November 2nd 2021



In this Wednesday, March 3, 2021 photo, container cargo ships are seen docked in the Port of Los Angeles. Shipping backlogs are set to make 2021 one of the smoggiest years for Southern California. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

WASHINGTON (SBG) — President Joe Biden announced an initiative to make the global shipping industry greener at the COP26 Summit as snarls in the supply chain appear to be fueling a spike in pollution.

The [First Movers Coalition](#) is scheduled to be launched Thursday as a partnership between the United States and the World Economic Forum. It aims to use the purchasing power of the U.S. government to incentivize corporations to shift toward cleaner and more efficient technologies in sectors with the highest carbon emissions, including shipping and trucking.

The initiative will start with more than two dozen of the world's largest companies, Biden told world leaders gathered in Glasgow, Scotland. "The coalition represents eight major sectors that comprise 30% of the global emissions we now are dealing with."

The announcement came amid growing recognition that the country's supply chain crisis is exacerbating the environmental crisis. In the Port of Los Angeles, 82 ships are waiting to dock up from 71 just a week ago. The Ports of L.A. and Long Beach were already taking 40% of all shipping containers entering the United States. With the backlog and recent federal pledge to [operate the ports 24/7](#), Southern California is on track to see one of the smoggiest years in its history, according to [Fleetmon](#), a maritime news and data service.

Virtually every piece of equipment in the port is burning fuel. Container ships are contributing around half of all emissions at the ports, followed by oil and chemical tankers. Tugboats and ferries are also contributing to pollution. On land, diesel trucks are idling for hours waiting to be loaded with goods as cranes move containers weighing over 20 tons. Last month's [oil spill in California](#), likely caused by a ship's anchor damaging an offshore pipeline, literally poured more fuel on the fire.



Parked cargo container trucks are seen in a street, Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021 in Wilmington, Calif. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)

The challenges are even greater globally, where maritime shipping accounts for over 80% of world trade and contributes over [1 billion tons](#) of greenhouse gas emissions per year. The health effects associated with emissions activities at and around ports have been [directly linked](#) to as many as 60,000 premature deaths worldwide.

The larger impact of on-port pollution has largely been brushed to the side to deal with the immediate economic implications of the [supply chain crisis](#) and port jams, said Richard Danderline, chief financial officer at Staxxon, a company that makes environmentally friendly, foldable shipping containers.

"People are focused on the bigger picture of how to most efficiently resolve this crisis," Danderline said. "I think all of these [environmental impacts] are unfortunately fallout from that attempt to fix this problem."

Staxxon's steel containers collapse so that five empties take up the space of one standard container. Danderline and Staxxon founder George Kochanowski explained that reducing the size of empties would help reduce CO2 emissions, speed up processing time at ports and result in 80% fewer trucks on the road moving empty containers. It would also help manage the backlog of empty containers taking up needed space at ports.

"Having foldable containers doesn't make the problems go away completely but it solves the current problem very quickly," Kochanowski said.

Among the bigger problems the industry will have to address is the use of heavy bunker fuel in ships. Bunker fuels contribute significantly to CO2 emissions and account for more than half of [oil spills](#). Industry leaders are currently exploring zero-emissions fuels and technology options.

As a whole, the global shipping industry accounts for between 2% and 3% of global emissions, according to [S&P Global Platts Analytics](#). Some scientists project that number could increase to 17% of total annual CO2 emissions by 2050. Emissions related to the shipping industry have decreased in recent years, though experts tie that primarily to larger shiploads and lower speeds. There are indications that ship speeds have increased more recently in response to the supply chain crisis.