

Intermodal volume falls 16.4 percent in U.S., Canada

(The following story by Thomas L. Gallagher appeared on The Journal of Commerce website on November 12, 2009.)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Total intermodal volume in the United States and Canada during the third quarter fell 16.4 percent compared with the same period last year, to 2,995,043 units, the Intermodal Association of North America reported Thursday.

That steep fall was an improvement over the 18.7 percent year-over-year decline in the second quarter.

The largest segment of the intermodal market is in international containers, which make up a little more than half of all intermodal traffic. That portion fell 23 percent year-over-year in the third quarter to 1,570,746 units.

International volume fell for a ninth consecutive quarter, with over 20 percent decreases realized during each quarter of 2009. IANA said it was encouraged by noting that the rate of decline decelerated in every month of the quarter, "with September's result only 20 percent."

Offsetting a small portion of the widespread decreases, domestic container volume increased in every U.S. region during the third quarter, growing 1.3 percent overall. Domestic advances during the quarter were entirely in 53-foot equipment, which jumped 5.5 percent, IANA said. Gains in domestic equipment volume have increased in each quarter of 2009. Domestic containers account for about 34 percent of the total intermodal market.

The rest of the market is in domestic trailers, which fell 25.1 percent to 395,308 units. Taking domestic containers and trailers together, the volume of all domestic equipment fell 7.7 percent to 1,424,297 units.