

Longshore Worker

Load and unload ships on the docks. Getting on the list is harder than doing the work.

TYPICAL PAY

\$40,240

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$31k to \$55k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Container terminals, docks, ship holds, port yards

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
That is the education side finished. Physical fitness and reliability matter far more.
- 2 Get your Transportation Worker Identification Credential** 2 to 3 months
The Transportation Security Administration issues it after a background check. You cannot enter a secure port area without one. Apply early, processing can take over 45 days.
- 3 Get on the casual list** Unpredictable
Watch for your port's hiring call. When a list opens it can be by lottery, because the number of applicants dwarfs the number of spots.
- 4 Work casual shifts** 1 to 8 years
Turn up at the dispatch hall, take what is available, build hours and a reputation. Show up every time you are called.
- 5 Get registered** When the port promotes
Move to registered status, then up the classes of registration by seniority. Now you have guaranteed work, the pension and the health plan.

Pros and cons

- + Registered dock work pays better than almost any other job needing no degree
- + A real union pension and coastwide health coverage
- + No tuition and no student debt at any point
- Getting registered can take years, and may never happen
- Casual work is unpredictable and will not pay the bills on its own
- Dangerous: heavy loads, height, machinery, its own federal safety rulebook

Optional boosts

Crane operator. Top handler and yard equipment. Lashing and hold work. Walking boss or foreman.

Good to know

The lottery is real

When a West Coast port opens its casual list, applications can run into the tens of thousands for a few hundred places, and names are drawn at random. People wait years for a list to open at all. It is one o...

The box cut the workforce and raised the pay

Before standard containers arrived in the 1950s, cargo was loaded piece by piece by huge gangs of men. Containers needed a fraction of the people and far more machinery. The unions traded headcount for...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand (53-7062.00)
Transportation Security Administration: Transportation Worker Identification Credential
International Longshore and Warehouse Union: longshore division
International Longshoremen's Association

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/longshore-worker>



Scan for the full clicker