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Local truckload carrier preps for import surge from China

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A locally based truckload carrier is trying to surge ahead in the midst of the coronavirus crisis.

Donna Lemm, EVP of national sales for IMC Cos., said all U.S. ports and inland rails remain open, which means the company's drivers continue to deliver freight.

Lemm acknowledged that before the coronavirus, the industry looked promising and intermodal volumes were strong. The Chinese New Year brought a typical seasonal lull for the transportation industry. But, Lemm said things changed when the virus hit Wuhan, China and import volumes from Chinese manufacturers dropped. Ocean carriers were also forced to cancel sailings out of China.

"That meant fewer containers for IMC Companies — and other transportation companies — to pickup from ports and rails," Lemm said. "Since China's factories are producing again, a bottleneck of containers are now on the water coming into United States' ports. At the same time we are working to protect our team and customers, we are preparing to handle this surge of imports."

Lemm acknowledged that the coronavirus has made the drivers' jobs more difficult. She said drivers now have to deal with reduced hours at the ports and rails as well as long lines — due to those reduced hours.

Many rest areas across the country are closed and drivers have limited access to supplies and bathrooms. IMC has offered hand sanitizer and thermometers to all of its drivers as well as educated them on safe practices.

"Our systems are designed so that the driver does not have to enter the terminal," Lemm said. "The driver's dispatch, communication, and scanning of paperwork can be handled via tablet — remotely. Our technology team has prepared team members for remote access to ensure business continuity."

IMC's office staff can alternate working from home and the office. The company has 2,500 employees throughout the country, Lemm said. Locally, IMC has 479 full-time workers, according to *Memphis Business Journal* research.

"Our priority is — and always has been — the safety of our employees, drivers, and servicing our customers," Lemm said. "Motor carriers throughout the country have been granted essential critical worker status, and all U.S. maritime operations have also been granted essential critical worker status. Our transportation system is vital to the United States and our trucks will continue to deliver our nation's freight."

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