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Separating Spin from Reality

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Message from the President and CEO



Dylan Bartlett
President and CEO,
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CELEBRATING LEADERSHIP, CONNECTION AND IMPACT

WOMEN LEADING SUPPLY CHAIN PANEL TAKES THE STAGE

At our 2026 National Conference in beautiful Quebec City, one of the most energizing and inspiring moments came from the **Women Leading Supply Chain panel**, a powerful session that brought together exceptional leaders to share their experiences, insights and vision for the future of our industry.

From the moment the conversation began, it was clear this was more than just a panel; it was a **celebration of leadership, resilience and progress**.

A Platform for Insight and Impact

The panel featured a dynamic group of female leaders who are actively shaping supply chains across industries. Through honest storytelling and practical insights, they addressed the realities of leading in a complex, fast-changing environment while also highlighting the importance of **innovation, collaboration and purpose-driven leadership**.

Discussions touched on:

- Navigating disruption with creativity and resilience;
- Building inclusive, high-performing teams;
- Leveraging data and technology to drive smarter decision-making; and
- Supporting the next generation of leaders through mentorship and advocacy.

These themes reflect a broader shift in the industry, where diverse leadership is increasingly recognized as a **driver of innovation, resilience and long-term success**.

Creating Space for Connection and Growth
Beyond the insights shared on stage, what made this session truly impactful was the **sense of connection in the room**.

Events like these play a critical role in fostering community, bringing professionals together to exchange ideas, challenge perspectives and build meaningful networks. They create an environment where leaders can **learn from one another, share experiences and collectively shape the future of supply chain**.

The engagement from attendees, through thoughtful questions, active participation and

continued conversations beyond the session, demonstrated the importance and value of these opportunities.

A Collective Effort

The success of the Women Leading Supply Chain initiative would not have been possible without the commitment and collaboration of many dedicated partners and supporters.

We extend our sincere thanks to:

- **Our panellists** for their authenticity, insight and leadership;
- **Our moderator** for guiding a thoughtful and engaging discussion;
- **Our sponsors and partners**, whose support helped bring this important conversation to life;
- **Our organizing team and volunteers**, who ensured a seamless and impactful experience;
- **Our attendees**, whose energy and participation made the session truly memorable; and
- **Loblaw Companies Ltd.**, our exclusive national partner for this impactful initiative.

Your collective contributions are what transform moments like this into lasting impact.

Looking Ahead

As we reflect on the success of this session, one thing is clear: the momentum behind women in supply chain leadership continues to grow and with it the opportunity to build a more inclusive, innovative and resilient industry.

Panels like this are not just about sharing stories, they are about **creating pathways, inspiring action and reinforcing the importance of diverse leadership at every level**.

The conversation doesn't end here. It continues in our organizations, our networks and the decisions we make every day as leaders.

Together, we are shaping the future of supply chain and it's a future defined by collaboration, inclusion and bold leadership.

READ MORE about this initiative in our special feature, on page 6. 🍁

Message du président et chef de la direction



Dylan Bartlett
président et chef de la direction,
Chaîne d'approvisionnement Canada



CÉLÉBRER LE LEADERSHIP, LES LIENS ET L'INFLUENCE

SOUS-COMITÉ DES FEMMES À LA TÊTE DE LA CHAÎNE D'APPROVISIONNEMENT PREND LA PAROLE

Lors de notre conférence nationale 2026, qui s'est tenue dans la magnifique ville de Québec, l'un des moments les plus stimulants et inspirants est venu du sous-comité « **Women Leading Supply Chain** » (Sous-comité des femmes à la tête de la chaîne d'approvisionnement). Ce fut une session marquante qui a réuni des dirigeantes exceptionnelles venues partager leurs expériences, leurs réflexions et leur vision de l'avenir de notre secteur.

Dès le début de la discussion, il est apparu clairement qu'il s'agissait de bien plus qu'un simple sous-comité. C'était une **célébration du leadership, de la résilience et du progrès**.

Une plateforme pour le partage de connaissances et l'incidence

Ce sous-comité a réuni un groupe dynamique de femmes dirigeantes qui façonnent activement les chaînes d'approvisionnement dans divers secteurs. À travers des témoignages sincères et des conseils concrets, elles ont abordé les réalités du leadership dans un environnement complexe et en constante évolution, tout en soulignant l'importance de **l'innovation, de la collaboration et du leadership reposant sur des objectifs bien définis**.

Les discussions ont abordé les thèmes suivants :

- faire face aux bouleversements avec créativité et résilience;
- constituer des équipes inclusives et très performantes;
- tirer parti des données et de la technologie pour favoriser une prise de décision plus éclairée et;
- soutenir la prochaine génération de dirigeants par le mentorat et la promotion de leurs intérêts.

Ces thèmes reflètent une évolution plus large au sein du secteur, où la diversité au sein des équipes de direction est de plus en plus reconnue comme un **moteur d'innovation, de résilience et de réussite à long terme**.

Créer un espace propice aux échanges et la croissance

Au-delà des réflexions partagées sur scène, ce qui a rendu cette session particulièrement marquante, c'est le **sentiment de connexion qui régnait dans la salle**.

Des événements comme celui-ci jouent un rôle essentiel dans le renforcement de l'esprit communautaire, en réunissant des professionnels pour échanger des idées, remettre en question des points de vue et tisser des réseaux utiles. Ils créent un environnement dans lequel les dirigeants peuvent **apprendre les uns des autres, partager leurs expériences et façonner collectivement l'avenir de la chaîne d'approvisionnement**.

L'engagement des participants, qui s'est traduit par des questions pertinentes, une participation active et des échanges qui se sont poursuivis au-delà de la session, a démontré l'importance et la valeur de ces occasions.

Un effort collectif

Le succès de l'initiative « Women Leading Supply Chain » n'aurait pas été possible sans l'engagement et la collaboration de nombreux partenaires et sympathisants dévoués.

Nous adressons nos sincères remerciements à :

- **nos panélistes** pour leur authenticité, leur perspicacité et leur leadership;
- **notre modératrice** pour avoir animé une discussion constructive et captivante;
- **nos commanditaires et partenaires**, dont le soutien a permis de donner vie à cet important débat;
- **notre équipe organisatrice et nos bénévoles**, qui ont veillé à ce que cette expérience se déroule sans accroc et laisse une incidence durable;
- **nos participants**, dont l'énergie et la participation ont rendu cette session véritablement mémorable;
- **Les Compagnies Loblaw Limitée**, notre partenaire national exclusif pour cette initiative à fort impact.

Ce sont vos contributions collectives qui permettent de transformer des moments comme celui-ci en des changements durables.

Objectifs pour l'avenir

Alors que nous revenons sur le succès de cette session, une chose est claire : la dynamique en faveur de la présence des femmes aux postes de direction dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement ne cesse de s'amplifier, et avec elle, l'occasion de bâtir un secteur plus inclusif, innovant et résilient.

Des sous-comités comme celui-ci ne se limitent pas à un simple partage d'expériences; ils visent à **ouvrir des voies, à inspirer l'action et à souligner l'importance d'un leadership diversifié à tous les niveaux**.

La discussion ne s'arrête pas là. Elle se poursuit au sein de nos organisations, de nos réseaux et dans les décisions que nous prenons chaque jour en tant que dirigeants.

Ensemble, nous façonnons l'avenir de la chaîne d'approvisionnement, un avenir placé sous le signe de la collaboration, de l'inclusion et d'un leadership audacieux.

POUR EN SAVOIR PLUS sur cette initiative, consultez notre dossier spécial à la page 6. 🍁

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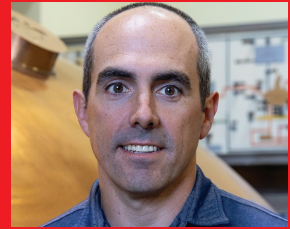
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A photograph of two women seated on a stage for a panel discussion. The woman on the left is wearing a floral patterned jacket over a dark top and a dark skirt, and is holding a blue folder. The woman on the right is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and glasses, and is holding a microphone. Between them is a small, square, gold-colored metal table with a glass carafe and two glasses. The background is dark with a large, glowing yellow circular logo featuring a white stylized 'M' and an arrow. The foreground is dark, showing the silhouettes of the audience.

WOMEN LEADING THROUGH SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS

**AI CAN'T SOLVE EVERYTHING IN THE AGE OF
DISRUPTION: SUPPLY CHAIN PANEL**

By Linda Slobodian



© Frederic Lavoie Photographie

Every week seems to bring a new challenge for supply chain leaders. From tariffs and geopolitical conflicts to extreme weather, disruption has become the new normal.

For women in Canada's senior supply chain roles, leading through uncertainty is nothing new. The skills needed to navigate constant change have been developed over years of managing increasingly complex global supply chains.

As organizations adopt artificial intelligence (AI) to improve efficiency and decision-making, it cannot replace human judgment and experience, said Stephanie Forbes, founder and CEO of The Forbes Group.

"Unfortunately, ChatGPT isn't going to solve all our problems.

We have a younger generation that thinks it can just stick everything into an AI tool and it'll come up with the solution for us," she said. "That's not the case."

Moderating the panel, Women in Supply Chain: Where Does Your Agility Live? How Women Are Leading Through Disruption, Forbes said AI is "an amazing tool," but "it's still a tool."

"We still have to navigate," she said. "We still have to figure out which way we want to go. We still have to apply morality. There's a bunch of stuff we as people still have to do as leaders in this space."

Industry professionals like Forbes shared advice rooted in their experiences during May's Supply Chain Canada National Conference 2026 in Quebec City.

Forbes was joined by panellists Sarah Nisker, vice-president of supply chain planning and initiatives for Loblaw Companies Limited; Melissa Cotton, CN's head of federal government affairs Canada; and RBC's Anne No, regional vice-president of commercial banking.

The panellists discussed how to lead rather than react during disruptions, and how adaptability along with proactive, holistic approaches can mitigate the effects of unexpected events.

"Leadership confidence under uncertainty is really important to create," Forbes said. "I'll call it an agility muscle. You've got to work it out, you've got to practise it, you've got to use it, you've got to build it."

She said skilled leaders empower and encourage their teams, ensure individuals have decision-making authority and clear protocols, and cultivate problem-solving skills.

"That's building credibility through being consistent under pressure, rising to that challenge, leading with precision and adaptability," she said. "We don't want to say, 'This is your job to figure out, but if you get it wrong, I'm going to string you up,' which happens. We can't do that."

Learning From Failure

Forbes said that people learn the most from failure and "little bits" can be healthy, productive and valuable for an organization.

"I can guarantee you you're not going to get it all right," she said. "So, how do we pivot, navigate, learn, fail, change, fail, change, fail, succeed, move forward? How do we create that adaptive iterative approach that'll help us navigate this new normal of massive disruption in these spaces?"

It's a formidable responsibility, given the stakes involved in timely delivery of goods to meet consumer needs, she said.

"The gross domestic product (GDP) of nations is how effective and efficient your supply chain is. If you have a great GDP, it means your goods and services are likely flowing reasonably well. If you have a not-so-great GDP, you take a look at what that looks like."

Panellist Sarah Nisker of Loblaw's said her company went through a "cultural transformation"



Melissa Cotton

Head of Federal
Government Affairs Canada,
CN

Anne No

Regional Vice-President,
Commercial Banking,
RBC

and shifted from a reactive to a proactive approach, where they viewed “disruptions as opportunities.”

“We get ready for and anticipate disruptions. We look for ways to find opportunities and ways to grow in a disruptive landscape,” said Nisker.

“Working in retail, you’re in a unique position,” said the lawyer, who formerly worked for retail and manufacturing clients. “We experience all kinds of disruptions all the way through the supply

chain because it culminates for us on shelves to the customer.”

She said her company has to be ready for every single “disruptive force,” which can include rail strikes, labour disputes or tariffs.

What contributes to the corporation’s competitive edge is the “stability, consistency, and predictability” fostered by chief supply chain officer Ron Wiebe and the senior leadership team, said Nisker.

This culture promotes a “high level of accountability,” extensive

preparatory efforts to anticipate results and develop options beforehand, and an “openness and readiness to embrace risks.”

“When you have stability in your core environment, it gives you the opportunity to start thinking about the what-if scenarios, the anticipatory kind of prep work you’d do for that scenario because you’re not worried. Your house isn’t on fire. You’re not dealing with crisis to crisis. You’re in a very stable, controlled environment,” she said.

A portrait of Stephanie Forbes, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair and bangs, wearing a black top. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

Stephanie Forbes
Founder and CEO,
The Forbes Group

A portrait of Sarah Nisker, a woman with long, dark hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white top. She is smiling and has her arms crossed.

Sarah Nisker
Vice-President,
Supply Chain Planning &
Initiatives,
Loblaw Companies Limited

Nisker said the rest is “good old-fashioned hard work.”

“Roll up your sleeves and do the work. Do the research. Do the due diligence,” she said. “Put in the time and effort to think through scenarios and scenario planning, then leverage technology wherever you can to help you with that scenario planning to make it a bit more efficient, more accurate, timelier, those types of things.”

Authentic Relationships Are Critical

CN’s Melissa Cotton said teamwork and finding common ground with partners are essential for this network in which “all the pieces need to be working

together to make sure we’re keeping supply chains fluid.”

“We’re in a space where we need to all be working in the right direction,” she said. “Whether that’s industry, whether that’s our supply chain partners, or frankly, government in terms of the way the regulatory environment is set up, to ensure that Canadian supply chains flourish.”

She said with the increase in labour disruptions, extreme weather events like forest fires, atmospheric floods and rockslides, companies can stay ahead of the curve.

“We’re in a bit of a different phase of reality right now where we have a 24/7 news cycle so we can all be a bit more educated

about these things,” she said. “We can talk about them more in the immediacy as they’re happening.”

Building authentic relationships and maintaining integrity are critical for Cotton.

“I believe that the first time somebody hears from me is ideally not in the midst of a disruption,” she said. “I pride myself on making sure we’re supportive of our partners in their process of the supply chain because we’re just one piece of it.”

She said celebrating and recognizing women in Canada’s supply chain is extremely important.

“What’s more important is to recognize that we’ve always been there,” she said. “There

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are some amazingly fantastic women all across supply chains doing some pretty cool things and they've been there for a long time."

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a long time.

“

Partners, Not Bankers

RBC's Anne No joined the bank in 2002, but one of the first sectors she worked in was supply chain.

No, an engineer, is now regional vice-president of commercial banking. She emphasized the importance of clients "seeing us as partners, not bankers."

"You need to think differently now to go for these emerging challenges," No said. "All the bankers in our team, all the relationship managers, had to contact all these portfolios of clients, make sure we are aligned with what we wanted to do and meet the needs of our clients."

No pointed out that RBC is "the second largest provider of

data after the government" and that benefits clients.

"What we wanted to do is inform our clients and equip them with these insights, what we saw for industry trends," No said.

That translates into improved customer service, quicker assessments and arriving at strategic business decisions.

No, one of RBC's 43 Canadian female executives who "worked hard to get there," noted the supply chain remains male-dominated.

"Supporting women is important specifically in supply chain because the decisions you have to make are more balanced," she said. "Specifically, with all these challenges I think

you need everybody around the table."

Forbes stressed that great leaders — like the male champions she was lucky to have when she started out 25 years ago as the only woman in supply chain meetings — demand results but will "protect you at all costs."

"One thing we do need to be a little more careful with, it doesn't matter if it's male or female, you still have individuals who are very self-serving and aren't team players," she cautioned. "For whatever reason, organizationally those types of behaviours tend to get rewarded based on results. They end up being quite toxic for the rest of the organization." 🍁



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CANADA LOOKS NORTH

MANITOBA ALLIANCE BUILDS NEW TRADE CORRIDOR

By Glenn Johnson

Canada is moving to reduce its reliance on traditional U.S.-linked supply chains by building a new trade corridor through the Prairies and into the Arctic — and a newly announced Manitoba alliance could become a key piece of that strategy.

A partnership between CentrePort Canada — located in northwest Winnipeg and in the

rural municipality of Rosser — the Winnipeg Airports Authority and Arctic Gateway Group aims to integrate inland, air and Arctic transportation into a single, co-ordinated network designed to move goods more efficiently to global markets.

The agreement — known as the Ports Manitoba Project — is about turning existing infrastructure into something more powerful.

“The MOU is really about telling the world that Manitoba’s transportation infrastructure isn’t just a list of assets — it’s an integrated system,” said Carly Edmundson, president and CEO of CentrePort Canada.

“We are formally working together to create solutions for the private sector when it comes to supply chain.”

The alliance links three key assets: CentrePort’s 20,000-acre

inland port, Winnipeg's 24/7 international cargo airport and the Port of Churchill — Canada's only rail-connected Arctic deep-water port.

Together, they form what Edmundson describes as the foundation of a new kind of supply chain.

"We're building a new supply chain north," she said. "The Port of Churchill has always been there, but as operations expand, there are new opportunities for goods flowing both out and in."

That northward shift comes at a time of growing geopolitical uncertainty and increasing awareness among Canadian businesses of the risks tied to overreliance on U.S. routes.

"I think we're seeing a shift toward more sovereign supply chains," Edmundson said. "Canadians are talking about supply chains in a way we never have before and understanding why infrastructure investment matters."

From Arctic Port to Inland Hub

A key part of the strategy is how the corridor functions as a system rather than a series of disconnected assets.

"Imagine goods coming in from Europe, landing in Churchill, moving down the Hudson Bay rail line and arriving at CentrePort — a 20,000-acre hub where they



Carly Edmundson
President and CEO,
CentrePort Canada

can be processed, manufactured and redistributed across North America," Edmundson said.

That inland component is critical.

"Seaports are limited by geography. You want goods moving in and out quickly," she said. "Inland

ports are where you process, add value and connect to labour, manufacturing and distribution."

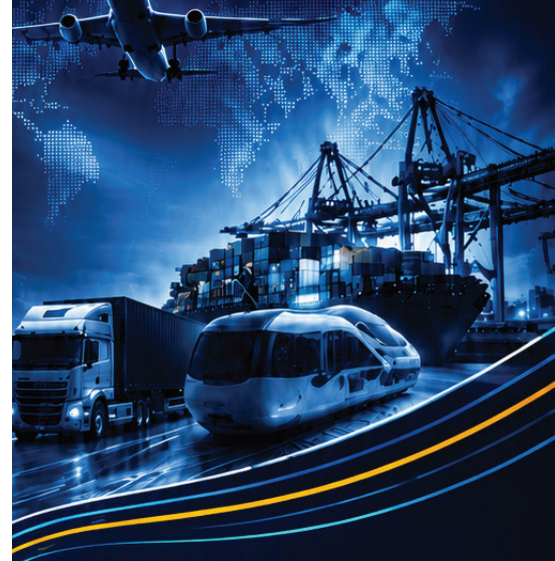
CentrePort — already home to roughly 1,000 companies — offers direct access to road, rail and air, as well as significant room for expansion. More than 10,000 acres remain available for development.

"We have something companies are looking for — optionality," Edmundson said. "With road, rail and air, plus space to grow and no congestion, companies have Plan A, Plan B and Plan C."

Churchill's Re-Emergence

The Port of Churchill has long been viewed as a strategic but underutilized asset. Now, with renewed investment in the Hudson Bay Railway and growing global interest in Arctic shipping routes, it is re-entering the conversation.

"On average, the Port of Churchill is two days closer to Europe than the Panama Canal — and far less congested," Edmundson said.



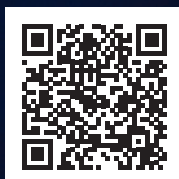
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**Prairie Arctic Corridor for Trade
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Connect Canada to the World**



**CentrePort Canada: Connecting
Canada with the World for
15 Years**



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to Date**





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While capacity and infrastructure challenges remain — including ongoing upgrades to the rail line — improvements are already underway. The rail corridor is faster than it was just a few years ago and new technologies, including drone monitoring and permafrost stabilization techniques, are helping improve reliability.

The integration with CentrePort helps address one of Churchill's longstanding limitations: scale.

With a population of roughly 1,000, the northern port cannot support large-scale processing or manufacturing. By linking to

Winnipeg, those functions shift south, allowing Churchill to operate more efficiently as a gateway rather than a bottleneck.

New Opportunities for Canadian Trade

The corridor is expected to support a wide range of industries, from traditional bulk exports to emerging sectors.

Rail-to-sea connections will continue to favour commodities such as grain and critical minerals, but Edmundson also sees strong potential in manufacturing, heavy equipment and specialized vehicles — sectors already clustered at CentrePort.

"We've got companies building fire trucks, ambulances, farm equipment and aerospace components," she said. "These are large, heavy goods that are well suited to move by rail and access global markets through Churchill."

A growing pharmaceutical and medical supply sector is also emerging, supported by time-sensitive and temperature-controlled logistics.

At the same time, changing global consumption patterns are opening new export opportunities closer to home.

"Demand for protein products, particularly pork, is growing in markets like Mexico and

Asia,” Edmundson said. “That creates opportunities not just north through Churchill, but south as well.”

A Shift in Mindset

Beyond infrastructure, Edmundson believes the alliance reflects a broader shift in how Canada approaches trade.

Historically, she said, the country has been cautious — even hesitant — to fully leverage its advantages.

**Manitoba leads
the charge
in Prairie
humbleness. But
now is the time to
be bold.**

“I think Manitoba leads the charge in Prairie humbleness,” she said with a laugh. “But now is the time to be bold.”

Canada’s reputation as a reliable, collaborative trading partner — combined with its natural resources and skilled workforce — positions it well in a changing global landscape, she added.

“There is so much good in Canada and sometimes we undersell it,” she said. “This is a moment where we should be confident in what we bring to the table.”

What Success Looks Like

For Edmundson, success will not be measured by announcements, but by adoption.

CentrePort has already seen more than \$1.5 billion in private-sector investment over the past seven years, a sign that companies are responding to its strategic value.

The next step is scaling that momentum across the broader corridor.

“We’re working with companies to identify common supply needs and attract suppliers to locate at CentrePort — to repatriate supply chains and increase reliability,” she said.

Longer term, she hopes the Manitoba model becomes

a template for the rest of the country.

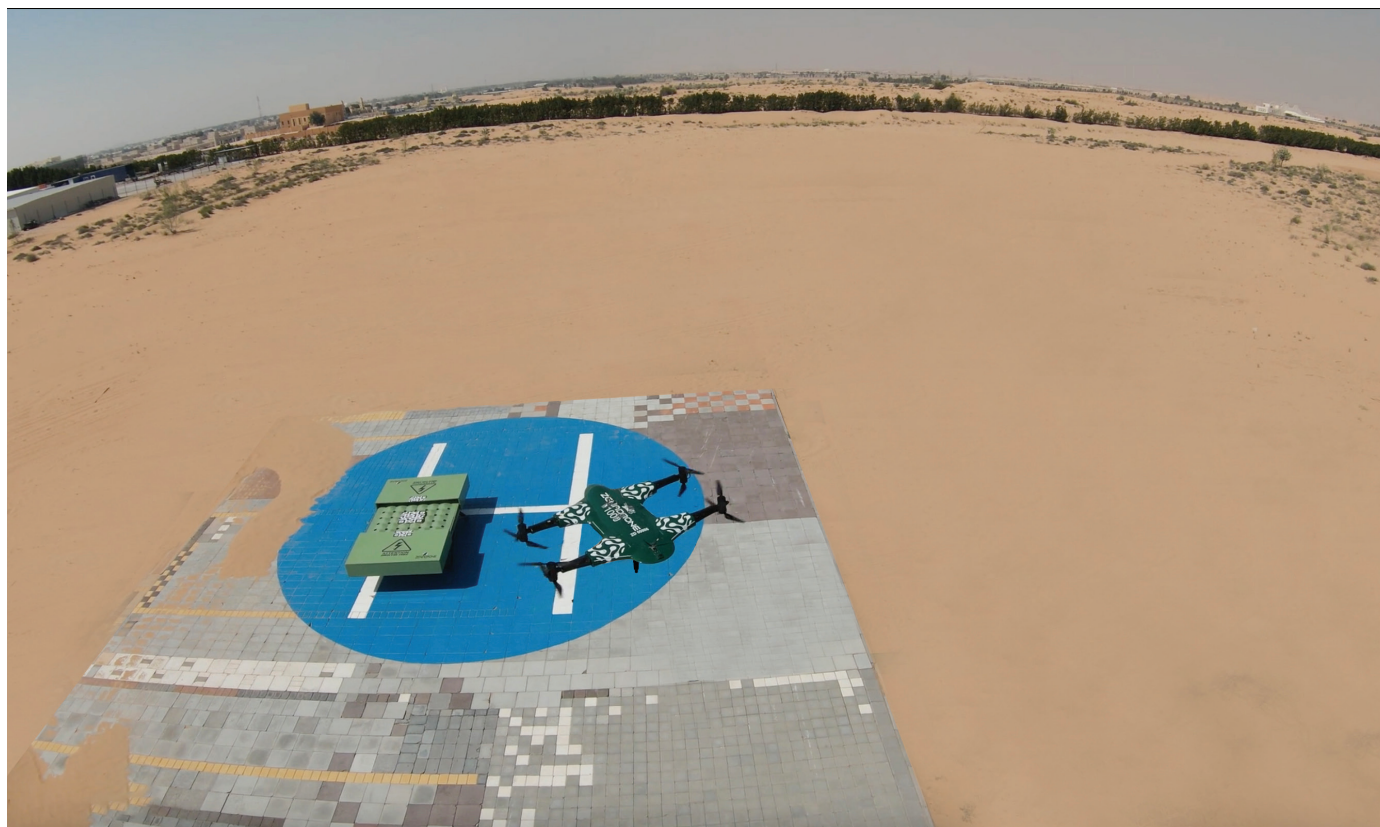
“Success in five years looks like enhanced co-operation across Canada’s transportation network,” she said. “Ports and trade hubs working together to build integrated solutions that meet business needs.”

For now, the alliance marks a significant step in that direction — and a signal that Canada may be ready to rethink how it connects to the world.

“This feels like a historic opportunity,” Edmundson said, “to re-establish Manitoba as the centre of commerce for the country and connect Canadian goods to global markets in a new way.” 🍁



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DRONES IN THE WAREHOUSE

SEPARATING SPIN FROM REALITY

By Glenn Johnson

For many warehouse operators, drones are still viewed as experimental, raising concerns about safety, disruption and complexity. However, industry experts say much of that skepticism is rooted in outdated assumptions.

"I would agree — it's one of those technologies where risk to product and risk to personnel is still where folks have concerns," says Phil Franklin, VP of business development North and South America for ZenaTech Inc., a company that supplies drones for warehouse use and is also in the defence business.

Yet those concerns are increasingly being challenged as the technology matures and real-world deployments expand.

"I think that's what's leading adoption," Franklin says. "Right now, warehousing is really seeing that this can reduce the amount of labour hours required

and shift some of those responsible parties into roles that are more labour-intensive."

Labour, Speed and Visibility Driving Adoption

At its core, the appeal of drones is straightforward: automate one of the most time-consuming and disruptive tasks in warehousing.

"If you're engaging 15 to 30 people over, say, six weeks just to conduct inventory, that's a significant payroll cost dedicated to counting," Franklin says.

"When that burden is removed, those employees can be reassigned to other areas of the warehouse, which can speed up production and improve throughput."

The cost comparison is equally direct.

"We're probably about one-third to one-half the cost of an employee performing the same task."

From Experimental to Deployable

Despite growing interest, many operators still see drones as not quite ready for full-scale use.

Franklin acknowledges that perception, but says the technology has advanced significantly.

"With our drone in particular, because of the technology we've built into it, allowing it to operate safely around people, it really positions us to lead the charge," he says.

The platform itself continues to evolve.

"We've evolved our platform — we're now in the third iteration — so we're constantly improving its capabilities, whether that's endurance, lifetime, battery life," Franklin says, "but also from an effectiveness standpoint — how accurate the data collection is."

Equally important is how that data is used.

"It's more than just capturing a barcode," he says. "It's also the validation process against their existing warehouse management systems or SAP (systems, applications and products) systems."

Implementation Timelines: Faster than Expected

One of the most persistent concerns is that drone systems take months — or even years — to implement.

Franklin says that is no longer the case.

"I would say within three months, we can get to a point where we're collecting data on a regular basis," he says.

That timeline reflects both hardware readiness and software integration.

"We can show up on-site with a ready-made product that can fly, scan and capture data," he says. "The software implementation can take a couple of weeks as well."

Each facility still presents unique challenges.

"Each warehouse is different — where barcodes are placed, lighting conditions, environmental conditions," Franklin says. "All of these can affect how quickly and effectively we can deploy."

However, overall the deployment window is relatively short.

"Within three months or less, we can set up and start that process."

Where the Limits Still Exist

While drones are well suited to structured environments, they are not a universal solution.

"That's not so much a myth as it is an actuality," Franklin says, referring to their limitations in unracked warehouses.

The issue is visibility.

"There wouldn't be any direct access to scan a barcode of something that's in the centre," he explains.

Alternative technologies, such as radio frequency identification (RFID), introduce additional complexity and cost.

"You would have to roll out RFID across the entire warehouse and that can be relatively expensive," he says.

Also, not all systems deliver the level of precision operators require.

"Some systems give you blind data capture — you know the SKU is there, but you don't know exactly where it is," Franklin says. "Warehouses want to know where the things are that are in the bin."

Accuracy Through Frequency

Where drones offer a clear advantage is in how often data can be collected.

"Frequency reduces shrink," Franklin says.

Manual inventory processes create gaps that increase risk.

"The longer it takes to scan inventory, the more opportunity there is for things to get misplaced or go missing," he says.

Automation changes that dynamic.

"With an automated system that can run autonomously 24 hours a day, you can collect inventory data more frequently and monitor it more effectively."



Phil Franklin
VP of Business Development
North and South America,
ZenaTech

Workforce Impact: Evolution, Not Elimination

Concerns about job loss often accompany new technology, but Franklin says the reality is more nuanced.

"Based on my experience so far, there hasn't been much pushback," he says.

In many cases, drones address existing operational constraints.

"These warehouses are often operating below capacity because of the demands of inventory control," Franklin says.

Rather than eliminating roles, the technology shifts responsibilities.

"Most people don't enjoy going around counting inventory," he says. "So when those responsibilities shift, there isn't a strong fear that jobs are being eliminated."

Human oversight remains essential.

"There's always a need for someone to go and identify where that item is and restore it to its actual location," Franklin says. "It just becomes a more simplified task."

Beyond Inventory: Expanding Use Cases

While inventory management is the primary use today, both Franklin and his colleague, Linda Montgomery, see broader applications emerging.

"I think for us, we want to get to a stage where we've reached perfection in implementation," Franklin says.

That includes expanding into dual-use capabilities.

"When they're not performing inventory counts, they can be surveilling areas, providing risk assessments, doing inspections-rack inspections, ceiling inspections," he says.

Montgomery, ZenaTech's VP of corporate development and investor relations, places that evolution within a broader technological shift.

"These are AI-enabled drones with sensors and data capabilities," she says. "Companies are thinking about digital transformation and cost efficiencies — these are the kinds of solutions that help with that."



Linda Montgomery
VP of Corporate Development
and Investor Relations,
ZenaTech

She also points to broader industry momentum.

"The drone industry in general is evolving quickly — more of the airspace is opening up," Montgomery says. "That's going to enable us to see more drones used more often."

Data, Prediction and the Next Phase

Looking ahead, both see data — and what companies do with it — as the next frontier.

"Predictive technology is going to be key," Franklin says.

"It's one thing to look at hard data and predict based on what you have, but AI can start to absorb information worldwide and really look at a predictive model."

That capability extends beyond individual facilities.

"It can help understanding where shifts in economics may be impacting businesses worldwide and down to where you are as a business locally," he says.

Montgomery adds that safety and sustainability will continue to drive adoption.

"Drones reduce the need for workers to climb ladders; that improves safety," she says. "And it's also a more sustainable solution."

From Skepticism to Consideration

For warehouse operators still on the fence, Franklin says the first step is simple: start the conversation.

"Everyone has their apprehensions about new technology," he says. "But when you're curious about it, a conversation gives you a better understanding of what the capabilities are."

From there, it becomes a practical evaluation.

"Let me show you what we can do, how we can do it, how this is going to affect your business over time," he says.

In an industry under constant pressure to improve efficiency, accuracy and cost control, drones may still face skepticism, but they are increasingly being judged not on perception, but on performance. 🍁

POLARIS COMMUNITY CARE UNIT OFFERS LOGISTICS SUPPORT TO RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE TORONTO FOR FAMILIES STAYING CLOSE TO CARE

Mississauga, ON - July 16, 2026 - Polaris Transportation Group is proud to extend its corporate social responsibility efforts to Ronald McDonald House Toronto. Through their Community Care Unit (CCU), the company is providing logistics assistance by delivering meals and essential items to families receiving hospitalized care across Ontario.

In 2023, Polaris launched the Community Care Unit to make a meaningful impact in the fight against hunger. The initiative helps local food banks, soup kitchens, shelters, and community food programs meet increasing demand through ongoing deliveries of donated food and essential supplies across the Greater Toronto Area, Southern Ontario, and beyond, including cross border support into the United States.

The Polaris CCU will assist Ronald McDonald House Toronto by transporting meals and supplies prepared by their in-house culinary and operations teams. These deliveries will benefit families staying in Ronald McDonald House Family Rooms located at The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, as well as hospitals in Mississauga, Markham, Scarborough, and Sudbury, Ontario.

"We're honoured to put our logistics expertise to work through the Community Care Unit to support the incredible work of Ronald McDonald House Toronto," said Dave Cox, CEO of Polaris Transportation Group. "If we can help with their logistics needs and play a role in advancing their mission, then it reinforces why we do what we do. We are proud to do our part in making a meaningful difference across our communities."

Established in 1981, Ronald McDonald House Toronto provides essential services that remove barriers and strengthen families when a child is seriously ill or injured. Through Ronald McDonald House and seven Ronald McDonald House Family Room programs located in hospitals across the GTA and Sudbury, families can stay close to the specialized medical care their child needs while remaining together during treatment.

More than a place to stay, Ronald McDonald House Toronto provides accommodations, meals, educational support, wellness and recreation programs, and a community of care for families who have travelled from home to access treatment. Whether families stay for a few days or many months, the House and Family Room programs help ease practical burdens so parents and caregivers can focus on what matters most: their child.

"When families travel far from home for a child's medical treatment, access to practical supports can make a meaningful difference," said Robin Kennedy, Director of Family Services. "Polaris is helping us deliver meals and essential supplies to families across our programs so they can focus on what matters most: their child's care."



Ronald McDonald House Toronto Polaris CCU

"This is a wonderful opportunity to lend a helping hand with Ronald McDonald House Toronto's meal and essential supply deliveries," stated Brenda Brajkovich, Director of Marketing at Polaris Transportation Group and CCU Program Lead. "We're inspired by the incredible work they do every day and are proud to support their operations team so they can focus on supporting families with children in treatment."

Supporting Ronald McDonald House Toronto also aligns closely with Polaris' Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) commitments and broader sustainability strategy. Through the Community Care Unit, Polaris continues to focus on creating positive social impact by supporting vulnerable communities, reducing food insecurity, and strengthening partnerships that improve the well-being of families across the regions it serves.

"At Polaris, sustainability is about more than environmental responsibility; it's about supporting people and communities in meaningful ways," said Fulya Karakas-Akgun, Director of Sustainability at Polaris Transportation Group. "Our support of Ronald McDonald House Toronto reflects our commitment to creating positive social impact and using our resources, people, and logistics expertise to support organizations that provide care and comfort to our communities during challenging times."

The Polaris Community Care Unit will continue to support Ronald McDonald House Toronto and looks forward to exploring additional ways to contribute to the important work they do for families across our communities and beyond.





SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING DEMAND BOOMING

GREENWASHING DOESN'T CUT IT

By Linda Slobodian

Demand for sustainable packaging to combat environmental waste, which increased significantly in 2025, is ramping up in 2026.

"We're seeing some of those shifts from our customers where in the past they talked about it, but as we look at it now, they're actively looking to do more meaningful things but still very, very mindful of cost in the current economy," said Todd Benton, Romeoville, Ill.-based VP of operations for the consumer sector in DHL's supply chain division.

The impetus extends beyond obligations to meet rigorous government regulations to foster recycling and minimize use of plastics, glue and ink containing harmful chemicals.

Environmental concerns compel companies and consumers to seek recyclable, reusable, biodegradable and compostable materials. Upfront costs for materials gaining popularity are often higher but bring short- and long-term savings.

There's rising intolerance for greenwashing, a marketing tactic that employs deceptive labelling

and inaccurately claims the environmental benefits of certain products and policies.

"One of the things that I'm hearing from customers is that greenwashing is no longer sufficient. Things that we talk about that are recyclable, a lot of plastics, have to be between 120 and 140 degrees in direct sunlight," Benton said.

"And there's 12 categories that have to hit for it to be recycled. That's not really recyclable in the real world. That's something that on paper is greenwashing."

DHL has 50 North American packaging locations and uses "almost 100 per cent" recyclable materials.

"What we're seeing is more plant-based products or more bio-driven products that are not petroleum-based; mushrooms and other things. There are so many that have come out," said Benton.

"Bamboo has made a huge resurgence. We're seeing aluminum come back at a high-scale, high-end because it's infinitely recyclable over and over and over again. Some high-end cosmetics that used to put a foil plastic on will now put an aluminum insert in."

Non-toxic compostable bioplastics packaging materials are made from bagasse, a fibre derived from sugar cane or sorghum stalks, and polylactic acid derived from cornstarch. Other compostable materials include seaweed, bamboo and kraft paper. Mycelium, a popular Styrofoam and non-degradable plastic substitute, is made from mushrooms. Reusable glass containers and aluminum use are increasing.

DHL's forecasted sustainable packaging trends to expect throughout 2026 include:

- More businesses will switch to bio-based alternatives that break down in composting conditions within months;
- Single-use packaging will wane thanks to circular packaging designed to reuse, refill and return. Deposit-return plans will extend beyond bottles to household goods and cosmetics;
- Smart packaging will gain momentum. It incorporates advanced technologies — sensors, QR

codes and near-field communication (NFC) tags — to improve product tracking, extend shelf life and engage customers; and

- Lightweighting — durable thinner cardboard, strength-engineered materials and new folding methods — in designs that reduce shipping costs and emissions will expand.



Todd Benton
VP of Operations,
Consumer Sector,
DHL Supply Chain Division

DHL determined growing demand led to a shift from big-budget brands using these materials to small and medium-sized enterprises being able to source them from specialized packaging suppliers and co-packing partners or ready-use formats designed for e-commerce.

Meanwhile, analysts forecast the digital printing market driven by sustainable packaging solutions will surpass C\$40 billion by 2032.

"One of the biggest impacts, too, that I've seen in the last couple of years is the movement to digital printing and water-based inks, getting away from litho that has a tonne of harsh chemicals. The recyclability on it isn't as high, whereas digital printing on demand has really made improvements. They're up to 1,600 DPI now. Quality has come up dramatically, making it a viable player in water-based inks," said Benton.

"We've been doing that for several years now, really pushing customers to look at so many improvements upon demand printing and the ability to print on a box uniquely versus having to apply a sticker."

In fact, stickers that add an extra layer of paper attached with generally non-recyclable glue are "obsolete," he says.

"I think some of the alternatives have gotten better and some costs have gone down. If you just



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look at the price of some of the bio-option labels that we had years ago, and tags, the costs have come down by as much as 80 per cent over the last few years.”

We’re seeing more plant-based products or more bio-driven products that are not petroleum-based, mushrooms and other things.

Packaging’s 3 R’s still stand, though.

“As far as trends, I think back to when I was in middle school. They had the words reduce, reuse, recycle, and Earth Day was born. When you look at the total ecosystem of being green it’s not just about recyclables or what we can do to reuse things, but also the greatest impact it can have on reduction,” said Benton.

Benton detects a shift in the reuse category, presenting “more

opportunities” for packaging in 2026 and a “strong revitalization” in the reduce category.

Poor packaging designs are steadily improving. Reduced wrapping and eliminating layers are making boxes lighter and more cost-efficient.

Benton cited one example of a customer who approached DHL with a display idea. DHL offered an alternative that reconfigured the pallet setup and contents of the box resulting in a “40 per cent reduction in shipping.”

“Instead of getting eight units in a box, they can now get 12 in a telescoping display. And that telescoping display, what it allowed us to do was create a box that would expand on the shelf but still give the same format. But it would allow it to be very dense on the pallet itself. As a result, we were able to get 48 cases on a pallet instead of 36,” said Benton.

Meanwhile, paperboard or recycled cardboard is favoured over bundle wraps with heavy polymorphing fill. Intricate packaging that’s difficult to open is passe.

“You’ve seen blister packs in the past that had those annoying things that you had to take your life in your hands to open to get to the inside,” said Benton.

“They got replaced with what’s called a blister board where it greatly reduced the plastic. It had a paper front and paper back and a smaller roll of plastic. This year we saw companies come out with an entirely paper blister board.

“It looks and feels the same. Instead of having a clear plastic window, it has a paper-printed pocket matching the shape of the product but has the image printed on it, but is 100 per cent paper with no plastic. That was one of the things we saw this year that I really think could take off.”

Paper plays a significant role in sustainable packaging.

“With the move to paper, it’s a natural shift that we’re not going to be insourcing paper from other countries. We run many operations in Canada for some large CPGs (consumer packaged goods). We see a blend of both imported from the U.S. as well as made in Canada, especially with paper goods. Canada has a lot of trees and makes a lot of paper.”

Benton’s advice? Stay informed. Choose partners wisely.

“Knowledge of the industry is important and (so is) having partners that have a resiliency to continue to dig and find in the market that’s always changing. We’re continuing to evolve, so (working) with the partners that have an unending desire to help humanity, I think, is incredibly important.” 🍁



BUYING TIME

CHINA STOCKPILES INVENTORY IN CANADA TO WAIT OUT TARIFF CHAOS

By Dennis Furlan

U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs have significantly affected global markets, especially Canada. However, Canada itself is affecting the tariff situation, and specifically supply chains, in another fashion. Foreign countries, especially China, are stockpiling inventory in Canada to wait out tariff

uncertainty before importing into the U.S. Third-party retailers, such as Amazon, Walmart and even Disney, which import goods from China, are deploying this inventory-stockpiling strategy.

How Canada Matters

Foreign companies seek Canada as an inventory safe haven because, as Toronto-based

retail analyst Bruce Winder says, "Canada is ideally located as a quick launching point to sell to the States once the tariff situation is eventually clarified for countries such as China."

Asked about the extent to which inventory stockpile is happening, Winder says, "Well, when Trump started his tariffs, I think some of these companies



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If that weren't enough, in response to the U.S. government placing more Chinese companies on a Pentagon blacklist for allegedly aiding the Chinese military, the Chinese commerce ministry has placed 10 American industrial suppliers on its export control list in industries such as rare earth minerals and drone manufacturing.

This back-and-forth uncertainty is the issue for many importers and exporters, and even those engaging in inventory stockpiling can only wait for so long. Winder says, "At the top of the list of things businesses don't want is uncertainty. So, the longer this goes on, the worse it is for everyone involved."

Winder adds, "I think these investigations are part of the trade tactics. They're trying to gain leverage on each other. You want to do an investigation, we'll do one, too. A lot of it is posturing. I think a lot of these investigations won't ultimately affect any final outcomes."

The Quest for Certainty

Asked if he sees any end in sight to this tariff uncertainty, Winder says, "Even with Trump, the situation can't last forever. Nobody really wants the uncertainty, regardless of what you think about tariffs. I keep hearing from businesses over and over again that they'd like some kind of conclusion, even with tariffs."

Winder does see some room for optimism, though. He says, "The congressional mid-terms

started to stockpile inventory in Canada. However, as the tariff uncertainty has continued, I think since the end of 2025 they may have backed off somewhat. The uncertainty is a factor."

The uncertainty surrounding Trump's trade wars is omnipresent in every facet of trade, including inventory stockpiling. It's one thing to wait out a predictable amount of time for negotiations to conclude, it's another thing when negotiations appear to be on again, then off again, in a never-ending spiral of uncertainty. Although Canada-U.S. negotiations are a testament to this uncertainty, China is also a focal point.



Bruce Winder
Retail Analyst

Over the last couple of years, deals have been made between China and the U.S., only to be thwarted by accusations of reneging and bad-faith implementation, and subsequent tit-for-tat retaliations.

For example, the U.S. Trade Representative has launched two Section 301 *Trade Act* investigations into Chinese trade practices.

Tit for Tat With China

In response, China's ministry of commerce has initiated two investigations into U.S. trade practices, one for hindering the trade of green products and another for disrupting global production and supply chains.

are coming. Tariff uncertainty and higher prices make it harder for Trump and the Republicans to do well. Even GOP-friendly businesses want some certainty at the border, so maybe something happens.”

Winder points to recent world events as a case study in how situations can be resolved under the Trump administration. “Just look at what’s happening in Iran. At first, Trump said it would take weeks. There was even talk of regime change. As the situation dragged on, there was talk of a deal, and then no deal,” Winder says.

“Then there was a ceasefire, more talk of attacks, now perhaps a deal. With Trump, there always seems to be chaos, but even he seems to want an end to it. And,

All these negotiations and tactics are a lot of hard work. Nobody wants to keep doing this forever.

in the end, Trump is a businessman. Businessmen like certainty, and Trump likes to make deals. So, maybe there’s some light at the end of the tunnel.”

The Trump Factor

However, Winder has a word of warning for anyone who believes simply out-waiting Trump



on tariffs is that light at the end of the tunnel. “Yes, there’s still a lot of uncertainty surrounding the tariffs, including with their legality, which the Supreme Court put into question recently,” he says. “But even some Democrats might find it hard to relinquish income from tariffs once all the dust settles. Once the money comes in, it might be hard to start turning it off.”

Trump seems to like being unpredictable, which adds to the uncertainty. It’s part of his method of operation. “He likes to say a lot of controversial things during negotiations. Calling Canada

a 51st state is a good example. Trump talks boldly. He negotiates boldly, but I think even he wants things resolved, and call it a victory,” Winder says.

The uncertainty also has perhaps dampened the initial enthusiasm behind inventory stockpiling.

“All these negotiations and tactics are a lot of hard work. Nobody wants to keep doing this forever. Everyone wants certainty. That way, stockpiling inventory won’t even be necessary anymore. Hopefully, we can get back to some kind of normal business,” Winder says. 🍁



SAILING TO NET ZERO

GLOBAL SHIPPING MOVES TO DECARBONIZE

By Tyler Nyquvest

On April 11, 2025, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) solidified draft regulations aimed at achieving net-zero emissions from global shipping by or close to 2050. The industry mostly praised these regulations, which are a framework to guide this carbon-dependent sector through stages of de-escalating to net-zero emissions. The effort is a landmark for an industry that is responsible for nearly three per cent of global emissions, according to the IMO.

In October 2025, support for the IMO Net-Zero Framework (NZF) was reaffirmed at an extraordinary session of the IMO Marine Protection Committee; however, the vote to adopt the framework was officially delayed by one year.

“The postponement was a disappointment and a surprise, and it was caused by diplomatic efforts that were sort of outside of the framework of the IMO,” said Jesse Fahnestock, director of decarbonization at the Global Maritime Forum. “So, it was a little bit hard to see how (the discussions) might continue, or if they might continue.”

Those diplomatic efforts may have overpowered the importance and urgency of the NZF’s implementation, according to Fahnestock, and have caused a rift in global perspectives.

“The delay has caused the field of possible negotiated outcomes to widen a little bit, where it’s not clear where everybody stands,” says Fahnestock. “Negotiation will continue later this year around the framework and then (they’ll be) looking at other

proposals and seeing if new compromises need to be considered.”

The Iran war and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz have had dire consequences for not only global fuel supply, but the entire supply chain network that depends on safe passage and inter-connectivity to flourish.

On May 15, 2026, Canada’s Chamber of Shipping announced that U.S. opposition to the IMO NZF had stalled implementation. The U.S. is hardly the only country to disagree on the framework. However, given the geopolitical situation, the country is unlikely to agree to any system that could distract it from the current crisis.

The next round of IMO meetings will resume in fall 2026. Decarbonization in shipping is a critical component to lowering global greenhouse gas emissions. According to Fahnestock, even if the opposition, which includes the U.S., Russia and Saudi Arabia, doesn’t agree to the framework’s terms, their votes won’t be enough to stop its progression.

The IMO NZF is the world’s first industry-wide system that combined mandatory marine fuel emissions limits and global greenhouse gas pricing for shipping. Under the framework, ships will be required to gradually reduce greenhouse gas fuel intensity (GFI) using a “well-to-wake” emissions calculation.

Ships will also have to pay for excess emissions above the GFI thresholds. Ships that outperform emissions targets will earn surplus units, while non-compliant vessels will need to buy remedial units or offset deficits through the IMO Net-Zero Fund.

“That is something that the U.S. has basically stated categorical opposition to. There are other elements that are controversial for different parties, but the penalty or tax for non-compliance is the single most detrimental to implementation,” says Fahnestock.

The emissions pricing revenues captured by the fund will go toward further supporting the framework by rewarding low-emissions ships, supporting clean shipping innovation and infrastructure and assisting developing countries with training and technology. It will also help vulnerable nations participate in the

global initiative, including island states, which Fahnestock says will need “some economic support for the impacts on their countries,” or “they won’t agree to it otherwise.”

Finally, the framework mandates that the shipping industry transition toward zero- or near-zero emis-

sions fuels and technologies. All of these regulations apply to large ocean-going vessels over 5,000 gross tonnage, which account for approximately 85 per cent of international shipping CO₂ emissions.

A special agency of the United Nations, the IMO consists of 176 member states and three associate members. An additional 66 intergovernmental organizations have observer status and another 89 international non-government organizations have consultative status.

Other important participants in this collective include the Marine Environmental Protection Committee, which handles environmental issues under the IMO’s direction. The International Convention for the Protection of Pollution from Ships is the global body for all parties.

Although the IMO NZF is critical, advancements at the regional level are perhaps more promising, according to Brent Dancey, director of marine climate action at Oceans North.

“A global approach is the obvious preferred method because it’s inclusive, fair and includes a fund that will help developing countries pay for the transition,” says Dancey. “Having a global system is what everyone wants but regional systems have already started to develop and show major commitment.”

Dancey refers to policies like clean fuel regulations, carbon taxes in the European Union and migration to new fuel types. However, advancements in key areas are already making a real impact in daily shipping operations.



Jesse Fahnestock
Director,
Decarbonization,
Global Maritime Forum



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There's close to a \$1.6 trillion investment opportunity for clean shipping fuels.

Efficiency, Electrification and Wind Propulsion

Vessels can reduce fuel use immediately through slower speeds, improved hull designs and new IMO efficiency standards for future ships, says Dancey. Also, new technologies can eventually introduce battery-powered vessels like ferries, fishing boats and short-route shipping, especially for interlinked coastal operations. Oceans North has worked directly with electrified fishing vessels within communities to measure their impact.

New sail and rotor technology can supplement engine power and improve fuel efficiency up to 15 per cent, Dancey says. Using this benefit to make incremental changes to extensive shipping journeys can amount to major reductions in fuel usage.

Vessels can plug into and use clean electricity while docked rather than using diesel-fuelled engines, something that already happens at many global ports but which Dancey says is grossly underdeveloped.

"Let's use the cruise industry in Vancouver as an example. Roughly 400 cruise ships come to Vancouver every year and each one of those ships produces as much energy as a small B.C. town like Nelson," says Dancey.

"B.C. has some of the cleanest electricity in the world. So, when these ships come and they spend 50 per cent of their time at berth, and 50 per cent either going to Alaska or wherever, you could plug them in, shut off their engines and use renewable electricity with shore power."

These would be expensive upgrades at facilities worldwide, but all future infrastructure will need to adjust to meet new types of power usage.



Brent Dancey
Director,
Marine Climate Action,
Oceans North

E-Fuels for Deep-Sea Shipping and Biofuels

Renewable synthetic fuels such as e-methanol and biofuels can help decarbonize shipping. Canada already has significant infrastructure and investment capital in the development of fuel alternatives, but the full potential has not yet been realized.

"There's close to a \$1.6 trillion investment opportunity for clean shipping fuels," says Dancey. "Canada already produces shipping fuels for domestic use on the Great Lakes and on the West Coast, but there's a tremendous opportunity for Canada to become a clean shipping fuel producer to support that Asian trade and European trade."

Fahnestock is hopeful about the framework and points to technological revolutions happening globally, with many organizations and countries pushing forward with projects meant to benefit the climate.

"Maybe we're falling a little bit behind our goals, but I don't think we're reversing," says Fahnestock. "In April's meeting, the chairperson asked every country if they support the IMO's greenhouse gas strategy still, which was first adopted unanimously in 2023, and every single country and every industry association said yes. That strategy was a huge achievement. The direction of travel remains what it was, and I think that we shouldn't lose sight of that." 🍁

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