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record for imports at the nation's major retail container ports and 2017 is on track to set a new annual high, according to the monthly Global Port Tracker report ...

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Boosted by continuing sales growth, August is expected to be the busiest month on record for imports at the nation's major retail container ports and 2017 is on track to set a new annual high, according to the monthly Global Port Tracker report released today by the National Retail Federation and Hackett Associates.

“Retailers are selling more and that means they need to import more,” NRF Vice

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foot-long cargo container or its equivalent.

August is forecast at 1.75 million TEU, up 2.1 percent from last year. That would be the highest monthly volume recorded since NRF began tracking imports in 2000, topping the 1.73 million TEU seen in March 2015. The 1.7 million-plus numbers seen in May and July and now expected for August and October would represent four of the six busiest months in the report's history.

September is forecast at 1.67 million TEU, up 4.7 percent from last year; October at 1.72 million TEU, up 3 percent; November at 1.62 million TEU, down 1.4 percent, and December at 1.59 million TEU, up 1.5 percent.

Those numbers would bring 2017 to a total of 19.7 million TEU, topping last year's previous record of 18.8 million TEU by 4.9 percent. That compares with 2016's 3.1 percent increase over 2015. While July numbers are not yet final, the first half of 2017 tentatively totaled 9.7 million TEU, up 7.4 percent from the same period in 2016.

The import numbers come as retail continues a long-term pattern of increased sales. Total retail sales have grown year-over-year every month since November 2009, and retail sales as calculated by NRF – excluding automobiles, gasoline stations and restaurants – have increased year-over-year in all but three months since the beginning of 2010. Retail employment, despite recent short-term fluctuations, has [increased by 1.5 million jobs](#) during the same period.

NRF has forecast that [2017 retail sales](#) – excluding automobiles, gasoline and restaurants – will increase between 3.7 and 4.2 percent over 2016, driven by job and income growth coupled with low debt. Cargo volume does not correlate directly with sales because only the number of containers is counted, not the value of the cargo inside, but nonetheless provides a barometer of retailers' expectations.

Hackett Associates Founder Ben Hackett noted that U.S. gross domestic product grew

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Savannah, Port Everglades and Miami on the East Coast, and Houston on the Gulf Coast. The report is free to NRF retail members, and subscription information is available at www.nrf.com/PortTracker or by calling (202) 783-7971. Subscription information for non-members can be found at www.globalporttracker.com.

NRF is the world's largest retail trade association, representing discount and department stores, home goods and specialty stores, Main Street merchants, grocers, wholesalers, chain restaurants and Internet retailers from the United States and more than 45 countries. Retail is the nation's largest private sector employer, supporting one in four U.S. jobs – 42 million working Americans. Contributing \$2.6 trillion to annual GDP, retail is a daily barometer for the nation's economy. NRF.com

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