
Slowdown signs - Great Lakes iron ore shipments hit lowest level in 71 years

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On January 7th 2010, Lake Carriers' Association announced that iron ore shipments on the lakes fell to their lowest level in 71 years in 2009. Iron ore cargoes on the lakes in 2009 totalled only 31,792,629 tonnes, the lowest level since 1938 when trade finished the year at 21,574,573 tonnes.

The 2009 total also almost perfectly replicates the 1935 trading performance of 31,765,852 tonnes. The lowest historical figure recorded for iron ore trade on the lakes is 3,996,441 tonnes for 1932, with a peak of 107,345,783 tonnes registered in 1953.

The slow pace of the iron ore trade as evidenced in the above figure for 2009 is a reflection of the situation last year in the North American steel industry. The steel industry in North America began 2009 operating at about 35% of capacity and, although a number of blast furnaces were restarted as the year progressed, the industry ended the year with about 30% of its capacity still idle.

The Lake Carriers ' Association represents 18 American companies that operate 55 US flag vessels on the Great Lakes and carry raw materials that help drive the nation's economy, including iron ore and fluxstone for the steel industry, limestone and cement for the construction industry, and coal for power generation. Collectively, these vessels can transport more than 115 million tonnes of cargo a year when high water offsets lack of adequate dredging on what has been referred to as the fourth sea coast of the United States.

(Sourced fro Duluth News Tribune)

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