



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

AUGUST 16, 2011

FYI

LABOR WORRIES LOOM AT WTC

By [JOSEPH DE AVILA](#)

Contractors are bracing for additional job actions at the World Trade Center if a new deal for unionized concrete workers can't be reached by Tuesday.

Earlier this month, concrete laborers walked off the job at One and Two World Trade Center, the new transit hub and a handful of other construction sites in the city amid a push by contractors to reduce their wages and benefits for residential and hotel construction by 20%.

Concrete laborers refused to work for three days before union officials agreed to extend their old contract through Aug. 16. All parties will continue to negotiate through Tuesday, people familiar with the matter said.

The Cement League, a contractors association that represents management, and the Cement and Concrete Workers District Council, representing concrete workers, didn't respond to requests for comment on Monday.

"I don't think anything was proved last time there was a couple of walkouts," said Steven Spinola, president of the Real Estate Board of New York lobbying group. "There are only a couple of sites they can hurt, including the transit center and parts of the World Trade Center."

A labor arbitrator ordered many of the concrete workers back to work earlier this month after they failed to show up at several projects that are covered by so-called project labor agreements, which forbid strikes. There are no project labor agreements covering One World Trade Center and the 800,000-square-foot transit hub, making them vulnerable to walkouts if a deal isn't made by Tuesday.

Contractors at the World Trade Center are taking precautions such as scheduling work that would be able to continue in the event that concrete workers refuse to work later this week. Hundreds of other construction tradesmen at the World Trade Center were kept off the job due to the earlier job action by the concrete workers.

Contractors that for decades have used unionized labor are now having a harder time competing with nonunion contractors, which are playing bigger roles in residential construction and mid-rise development, Mr. Spinola said. With high unemployment in the construction industry, unions need to help bring down the cost of construction in order to put more tradesmen back to work, he said.

Carpenters also need to hammer out a new contract with contractors associations before their extended deadline expires Aug. 19. Dozens of unionized carpenters joined concrete workers in refusing to work at the World Trade Center earlier this month. A spokesman for the New York City District Council of Carpenters said the union continues to negotiate in good faith and hopes to reach an agreement soon.