

# Simulator helps plow operators prepare for snow

## State's winter workers undergo training at DeIDOT Dover campus



**Delaware Department of Transportation employee Kevin Van Vorst Sr. practices plowing snow on a simulator Monday at the DeIDOT campus in Dover. Mr. Van Vorst has been working for DeIDOT since March and this will be his first year driving a large truck with a plow on it.**

**By Chris Flood**

Delaware State News DOVER — Winter is just around the corner and the Delaware Department of Transportation's plow operators are getting ready.

DeIDOT truck drivers who plow snow are spending two hours this week using a state-of-the-art driving simulator to prepare themselves for the months ahead. The training is taking place at the DeIDOT campus in Dover.

Jim Westhoff, DeIDOT community relations officer, said the department is always looking for ways to sharpen the skills of its drivers.

"We're looking into having it every year," Mr. Westhoff said of the first-year program. "It's important that our people are well-trained."

DeIDOT is responsible for maintaining 13,501 miles of highways, 224 fixed-route buses, 284 paratransit buses, 1,163 traffic signals and much more throughout the state.

The simulator was provided by L3 Communications, a Salt Lake City-based company.

George Perez, L3 Communications senior training manager, said the program is used all over the country and Canada as a tool to improve driver skills. There are four simulators within the company and recent clients include departments of transportation in Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky and Texas.

"This course is applicable to the novice and the experienced driver," he said.

The key to the simulator experience is being able to control weather conditions from a remote location.

While the driver is in the simulator seat, Mr. Perez has the ability to control all weather variables (wind, snow amount, ice), making each drive a unique experience.

Mr. Perez said the program is used as a training tool by the truck drivers on the History Channel TV show "Ice Road Truckers."

Training for the drivers consists of a computer based information piece, where they read how to handle certain situations. Afterwards they apply that information to the simulated driving.

Gary Licsko, of Milford, works for DeIDOT's Area 2 road crew. This will be his 11th winter working as a plow operator.

"It was pretty close to realistic," he said. "The only thing better would have been to be in the truck itself."

Mr. Licsko said wind and ice play a big role in plowing the roads of Delaware.

"It has a lot to do with Mother Nature, with all the temperature changes," he explained as to why the roads are a challenge.

Mr. Licsko said plowing roads simply isn't "as easy as dropping a plow and throwing sand."

Kevin Van Vorst Sr., of Georgetown, works for DeIDOT's Area 4 road crew. This will be his first winter as a plow operator after he was hired in March.

Mr. Van Vorst said his experience to date has consisted of driveways in a pick-up truck, but never in a large truck with a plow. "It was neat. It feels real. It feels like you're right in the truck," he said. "It was good training."



**A snow-ready DeIDOT truck sits next to a truck driving simulator on the DeIDOT campus in Dover. Plow drivers for DeIDOT got some early snow plow training on Monday.**



**Gary Licsko practices plowing snow on a simulator Monday. Mr. Licsko has been working for DeIDOT for 11 years, but said the first-time training was a good idea for both new workers and experienced drivers.**