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November 9, 2010

Jim VanDenEizen
Crossroads Safety Management Group
P O Box 12174
Green Bay, WI 54302

Dear Jim,

Enclosed please find copies of the three newspaper articles that were published after you completed the simulator training with our department. Thank you again for the very professional training that you provided to our staff.

Sincerely,

St. Croix County Highway Department

Snowplow drivers ready for season

By Jon Echternacht
echter@river.towns.net

Whether anybody wants to admit it or not, the snow season is just around the corner. In preparation for those nasty days when the roads must be cleared early and sometimes often, St. Croix County Highway Department truck drivers took part in a two-day program in Hammond designed as a refresher course on the perils of the road.

"It's an annual safety refresher," said Jim Van Den Elzen, who heads up the Crossroads Safety Management Group and brought the sophisticated technical equipment that makes up the simulator to Hammond.

Three large computer screens depict the road as viewed from the cab of the truck. A regulation seat

See **PLOWS** Page 4A

Continued from page 1A

and reproduction dashboard replicate the feeling of being in a real truck complete with engine noise and hydraulics but without the diesel fumes.

The view on the computer screens gives every impression of snow-covered roads, rural and urban, with all the hazards such as a deer bounding across in front of the plow or a stalled car on the side of the road.

Van Den Elzen sets up the situation from a computer set well back of the action while an assistant guides the driver through the basics.

"Each session goes for about 10 to 12 minutes," said Van Den Elzen, who has operated the program since 2007. He said the rule of thumb from truck driving firms who use a similar system is that one hour of simulation equals four hours of driving.

The low-carbon footprint is another advantage of the simulator. "No gas is used," he said.

Tim Ramberg, county highway commissioner, said last week's sessions were the first time the department has used a simulator.

"Having them here saves travel and gas," he said.

Ramberg said 69 drivers were scheduled for sessions over the two days including some drivers from municipalities and law enforcement departments.

"The simulator can be used for police car and ambulance training," said Van Den Elzen.

Plows / Snowplow simulator prepares county drivers



PHOTOS BY JON ECHTERNACHT
Veteran driver Brian Hurtgen takes a turn in a snowplow simulator last week in preparation for the coming winter at the St. Croix County Highway Department in Hammond.



Veteran driver Brian Hurtgen tried his hand at a session on the simulator.

"It was very realistic. A very good refresher," said the 71-year-old Hurtgen who admitted to driving trucks since he was 16 or maybe 13 without a license.

Computer set-up in a trailer generates the road conditions and simulation for the truck simulator.

...more than 8 percent from 7.67 last year to \$8.31 per 1,000 of property value for

...District property valuation, according to estimates provided by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. In

Plow operators gear up for snow season

Reporter tries her hand at fighting the elements

By Ashley Halladay
News staff writer

Anyone who has been watching the weather forecast knows that snow is just around the corner. Snow that is sure to moisten the bottoms of our pants, freeze our ankles and burn our faces as we take that long trek across the parking lot. As most Midwesterners know, snow can definitely impact our daily commute, especially those of us without four-wheel drive.

While many people like me dread winter driving, we often forget about those individuals who help to make our drive to work, school and home safe when Mother Nature seems to have it out for us.

I'm talking about the men and women at the St. Croix County Highway Department driving around those big beautiful yellow-greenish plow trucks. You'd think the beautiful color, blinking lights and frighteningly large plow blades would be enough to keep people a reasonable distance away ... but that is not the case. Ask any plow driver and they'll tell you they get cut-off and tailgated on a regular basis. For those of you guilty of this, please stop.

Lucky for us, plow drivers in St. Croix County are taking steps to ensure they know how to handle anything careless drivers or Mother Nature throws at them.

Simulator

Between Oct. 27 and 28 around 70 people from professions such as semi-drivers, snow plow drivers, heavy equipment operators, police, mechanics, engineers and surveyors, took part in a state-of-the-art trailer simulator stationed in a vehicle in the parking lot at the St. Croix County Highway Department in Hammond.

The best way to describe the simulator is as a very high-tech, realistic and educational arcade game. The highway department hired



On Oct. 27 and 28 the St. Croix County Highway Department brought in a vehicle simulator to prepare employees for the 'snow-fighting' season.

Crossroads Safety Management Group to bring the simulator to the county. The simulator imitates system failures like tire blow outs, brake failure, accelerator failure, brake lock-up and engine over heating; environmental factors like rain, ice, night, wind, snow and fog; surrounding vehicle behaviors such as control aggressiveness, traffic signal reactions, various DUI levels and collisions.

The average simulation ran around 15 minutes, at a price of around \$75 a person (paid for by those departments participating).

Jim Van Den Elzen, owner of Crossroads Safety Management Group, said that one hour in the simulator is equivalent to four hours of actual driving.

According to a Crossroads brochure, "Better skills learned through simulations will translate into less accidents and safer roads for everyone."

Positive response

Ramberg said the department is

not using the simulator to make a judgment, rather to bring drivers "back to reality" in preparation for the winter and possible scenarios drivers might face.

"With all the increased discussion level and heightened winter maintenance level of awareness that the simulator has generated for us, I am calling it our 'stimulator,'" Ramberg said.

He said he feels the simulator came just in time to transition everyone into the "snow-fighting" season.

Ramberg received a disk with analysis from every simulation that occurred during the two days. He said the information gathered would be used to look at what workers are doing well and what areas need improvement.

Ramberg said the department received an "overwhelmingly positive response."

Participants were continuously giving each other advice, asking questions and discussing scenarios with each other during and after the

consists of hours of videos or conferences that would cost departments at least \$70 a night for a hotel, plus the price of meals and work missed by employees attending the conference.

'Just doing our job'

Jim Peterson has been plowing for 16 years and said drivers often "think (plow drivers) are in their way." He said while driving he's been given the finger, had stuff thrown at his truck and witnessed people speed past him, only to end up in the ditch or spun out.

"We're not trying to make people mad, we're just doing our job," he said.

He hopes other drivers on the road will assess their speed, stay a reasonable distance away from plow trucks and manage their anger as the trucks operate and go the slower speeds they do for a reason.

As drivers, we all need to be cautious, have patience and obey the yellow lights. Remember plow drivers put in long hours to keep our winter roads as safe as possible, a little courtesy is the least we can do.

My experience

I was fortunate enough to be given a behind the scenes tour of the highway department. I was able to walk around the garage that houses a number of massive plow trucks. Ramberg let me hop up into one of the newer trucks. I was amazed at how high the trucks sit and at the number of buttons, knobs and switches drivers need to control to remove snow from roadways.

I tried my hand at the plow and semi simulator. After I drove 80 mph on the highway, ran a red light, went off-roading, hit a car (that cut me off) and caused a pileup, I started to get the hang of it. By day two, I could have been mistaken for a professional semi-driver (or so I would like to think). To see video of my experience go to www.nwrchmond.com/event/videos.

simulations, which is what Ramberg was hoping for.

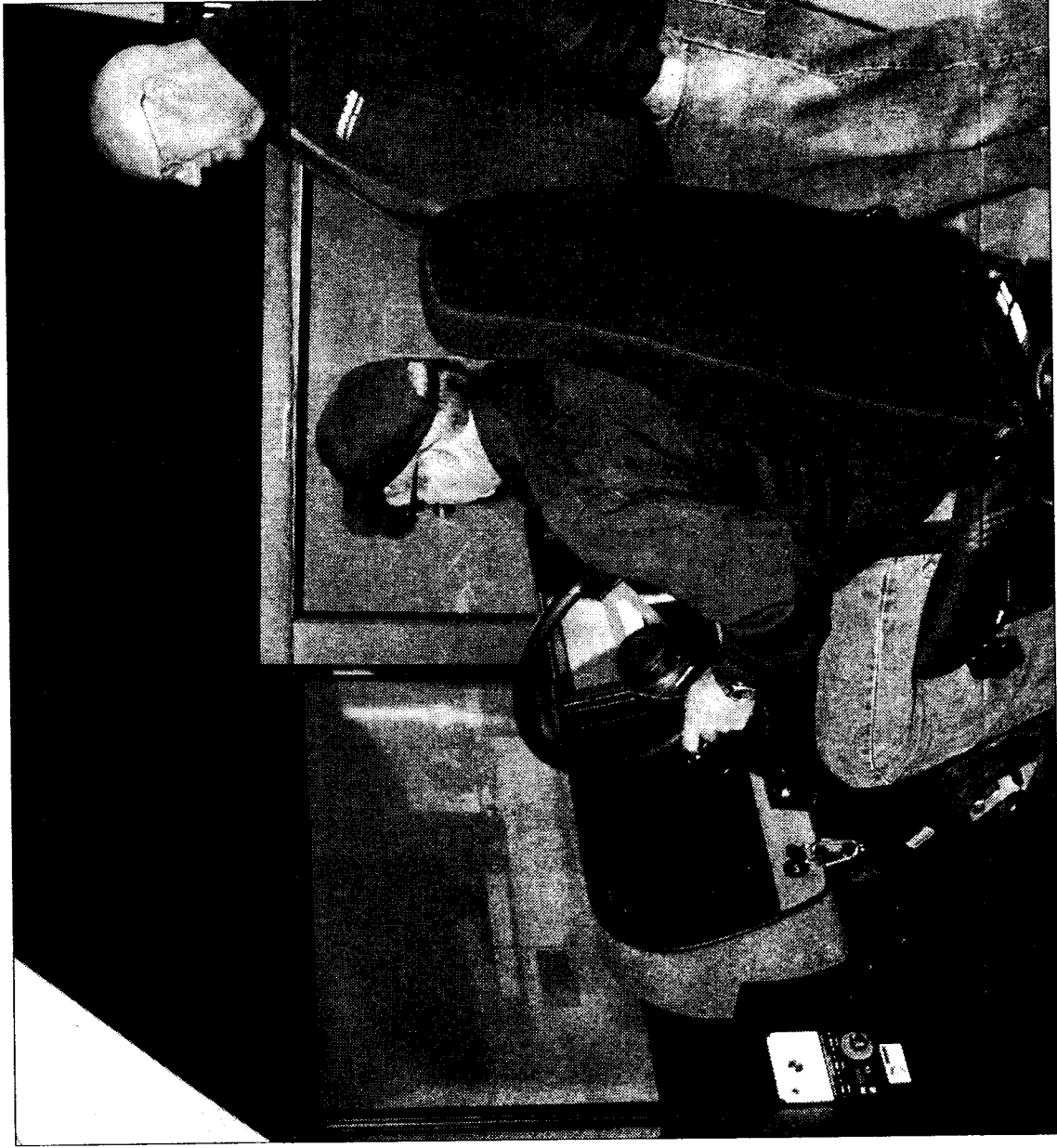
State Rep. John Murtha even stopped by to try out the simulator. He said, "It was fun. It was great." He added that he thought the simulator gives users a good opportunity to experience a number of different scenarios and "gets you thinking about things."

Not typical training

Ramberg said the department does a lot of "cross training." While everyone who plows is required to have their commercial drivers license, individuals who were not hired to plow can be called upon during heavy storms to ensure there are enough drivers to man all the trucks. Ramberg said he is proud of the "Midwestern work ethic" at the department and that he has noticed employees always seem "ready to serve."

Ramberg said the simulator has been a great way to train new hires (who already have their CDL) in a not-so-typical way. Typical training

Driver training simulator used at SCC Highway Department



Steve of Crossroads Safety Management Group at right watches as St. Croix County Highway Department employee Mike Thompson trains for snowplowing for the upcoming winter.

With winter and all the driving conditions it brings, nearly upon us, the St. Croix County Highway Department took part in a computer simulated driver training program last week. In addition, with different training scenarios that can be loaded into the computer, both Sheriff's Department deputies and employees of the Town of Somerset participated in

training exercises.

The driver training was conducted by Crossroads Safety Management Group of Green Bay. The training takes place in a large, self-contained trailer that was brought on-site at the Highway Department at Hammond.

Crossroads was conducting the training sessions for two days at the Highway Department. Highway De-

partment employees who plow roads all received training. There were programs both for plowing rural roads and interstate highway. There are also programs for police driving. Programs are also available for many weather conditions.

All the driver training is recorded and can be evaluated at a later date.

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