

Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum tests emergency preparedness during installation exercise

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Fall is approaching but it is the following season that has Fort Drum and 10th Mountain Division (LI) officials on alert.

A full-scale readiness exercise, Sept. 15-16, simulated the impact of a major blizzard and tested the coordinated response across multiple garrison directorates and division staff.

“It is important that we make sure that our installation is prepared for whatever type of emergency that might occur here,” said Rich Hughes, Fort Drum emergency manager. “So, we try to plan these exercises based on the most likely type of weather events, accidents and human threats, and make sure that we have plans in place and can respond accordingly.”

Hughes admitted it might seem unusual to simulate a severe weather scenario in 70-degree weather, but that didn’t diminish the need to rehearse plans and procedures based on past winter events:

*A severe lake-effect winter storm in November 2022 produced record-breaking snowfall that prompted a state of emergency in parts of New York. Between one to three inches of snow per hour resulted in numerous road closures and event cancellations. Fort Drum

received a total of 54 inches by the time the storm lifted, while snowplows worked to keep access control points and main roads accessible.

* In 2024, a lake-effect storm blanketed parts of the Great Lakes region and brought close to 40 inches of snow in some parts of New York ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday. A state of emergency extended to Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties.

“Obviously, we won’t have snowplows on the roads for the exercise, but we create conditions for all the directorates participating to react to,” Hughes said. “You aren’t looking out the window and seeing snow, but you are getting information updates indicating weather impacts, such as road closures, redeployment flight delays and power outages.”

This information sharing and coordination of efforts initially occurred through a virtual Emergency Operations Center (EOC) as directorate representatives reported updates on a Teams channel. Once weather and road conditions improved, officials gathered at the actual facility designated as the EOC.

Magrath Sports Complex staff worked with brigade Soldiers to establish an emergency shelter in the gymnasium, due to an extended power outage that affected housing residents. This included a sleeping area for 260 people, a medical station, dining area and activity space. There were designated areas for families with and without pets.

Maj. Lajuana Dixon, chief of Army Public Health Nursing at Fort Drum, and Sgt. 1st Class Steven Brickhouse, noncommissioned officer in charge, were on site to inspect the emergency shelter.

“We want to make sure everything here is safe from a public health perspective,” Dixon said. “We’re looking at the cots and making sure there is adequate space between families. We

would also check that food, water and sanitation needs are met, and that proper refrigeration is available for medications and formula.”

Dixon said they also consider people with special needs, the elderly and pregnant women.

“There are a lot of things we must identify when providing shelter for the community, and it’s important that we ensure that we can support it safely,” she said.

At the same time, the Emergency Family Assistance Center activated inside the Family Resource Center.

“On order of the garrison commander, Fort Drum Army Community Service turns into the EFAC,” said Richard Stepanek, ACS operations officer. “Besides this exercise, we conduct our own internal training on how to handle emergencies because for Soldiers and family members this is their one-stop shop for assistance on the installation.”

In addition to ACS and Directorate of Human Resources departments, the EFAC also has representatives from Behavioral Health, Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, and the Fort Drum Chaplain’s Office.

“As people come in, we identify what their needs are and escort them to the right agency that can help them,” Stepanek said.

Although Fort Drum families went about their normal activities during the exercise, Hughes said there is a way they can participate.

“September is National Preparedness Month, and this is a time when individuals and families are reminded that emergencies can happen without warning,” he said. “Just like we

plan and practice for worst-case scenarios at an installation level, families can be proactive and come up with their own response plans, for situations like a house fire or a snowstorm.”

Individuals are encouraged to learn skills, like CPR or basic first aid, which they can register for through the American Red Cross, and make an emergency supply kit for the home and car.

To learn more about National Preparedness Month and how to get involved, visit www.ready.gov/september.

Fort Drum community members also can plan ahead and register for a winter driving course and snow blower operation course through the Garrison Safety Office. Classes are scheduled from October through March. The schedule is available on the My Army Post App.

To register, call (315) 772-3022 or 772-0310. Classes are held at the Garrison Safety Office, located in Bldg. 4884 on Jones Street.

Community members can find post status reports and road conditions on the installation at <https://home.army.mil/drum/about/post-status-weather-alert-messaging>. There is also a link to register for the Alert! emergency messaging service.

Winter safety information is available on the Fort Drum website at <https://home.army.mil/drum/about/Garrison/safety-office/winter-safety-reources>.

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Photo Captions:

FSE 1 - In the event of an emergency on post, the garrison commander can activate temporary shelter inside Magrath Sports Complex. This operation was tested with the help of 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers on Sept. 16 during the full-scale readiness exercise on post. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

FSE 2 - Fort Drum Army Community Service converts into the Emergency Family Assistance Center as community members enter the facility Sept. 16 to receive assistance during the full-scale readiness exercise. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

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