Press Release

Release Nr:  2211-05

November 22, 2022

Fort Drum Public Affairs

**Fort Drum reacts to powerful snowstorm**

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Nov. 22, 2022) – All indications that a massive lake effect snowstorm would cover the North Country over the weekend came true, giving Fort Drum officials a chance to test severe weather procedures before the start of winter.

After the garrison commander issued the “Do Not Report” order for the Fort Drum community on Nov. 17, cancelling the following duty day for all non-essential personnel, the Public Works’ snow operations crew made all efforts to stay ahead of the storm.

As foot after foot of snow fell – a total of 54 inches by the time the storm lifted – snow plows worked to keep access control points and main roads accessible, before concentrating on other critical roadways and buildings.

According to the Fort Drum Directorate of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security, the first two “Do Not Report” days were based entirely on weather conditions. But by mid-Sunday into Monday, the status was more about recovery operations and limiting the number of pedestrians and motorists that may impede the efforts.

“Having grown up here, and then being back here since 2009, I don’t recall where we got this much snow in such a quick period of time, said Eric Wagenaar, deputy to the garrison commander. “It’s amazing that the forecasters got it exactly right, four to five feet. People tend to underplay forecasts a little bit – ‘I’ll believe it when I see it.’ We saw it.”

Wagenaar said the decision for an early release on Nov. 17 allowed community members time to prepare ahead of the incoming storm.

“This gave people a chance to get any supplies they didn’t already have or maybe make that one last check on the snowblower,” he said. “I think being a little bit pre-emptive on our part helped a lot of families to prepare. And I think the fact that we didn’t see any major emergencies is a part of that.”

The sheer heaviness of the snow, combined with a mix of rain and sleet, made recovery efforts even more difficult for snow crews and residents. Wagenaar credited the PW team for their tireless efforts to plow through the storm.

“They’ve been performing amazingly, going on four days now,” he said. “PW immediately made the adjustments and exchanging the equipment with the right capabilities to handle the changes in weather conditions.”

10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum engineer units also contributed to the snow removal operations, digging out barracks and the access control points at the height of the storm. Midday on Nov. 21, Soldiers from the 91st Military Police Battalion’s 642nd Engineer Support Company had their heavy equipment in high gear to unbury Child and Youth Services’ buses and clear the parking lot at the South Riva Ridge Child Development Center.

Sgt. Richard Therien, one of the of the horizontal engineers on the project, said they had just cleared out the snow from the military police headquarters and motor pool when they shifted their attention to the CDC.

“We’ve been at this all weekend,” he said. “First we had to dig ourselves out, and then we started assisting others – whoever needs help on post.”

Therien said that the depth of the snow has been challenging.

“It makes thing go slower than we are used to,” he said. “If it is like a foot or two, then we can easily go right through it, make big berms and clear out the snow. But when it’s piled this high, then it gets harder for us to do that.”

Therien said the work is fun for the Soldiers because they get to operate their equipment extensively, and in a meaningful way to support the community.

“This allows the whole post get back up and running again,” he said. “Fort Drum is known for the snow, and we can’t let a little dusting like this stop us.”

From inside the Emergency Operations Center, a team of subject-matter experts from across the installation directorates collected real-time information about current road conditions across post and accessibility to key facilities to help inform the command team.

This included a report of any storm damage to infrastructure, which services and organizations are operational, the status of upcoming events and the potential for postponement and cancellations, and accountability of all personnel across the 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum.

On Nov. 22, two days after the last snow fall, Fort Drum returned to normal duty status with all essential services resuming support to the community. Wagenaar said that the recovery efforts after a storm of that magnitude was nothing short of incredible.

“It is difficult to find words that can properly describe our amazing civilian workforce on Fort Drum,” he said. “Our civilian team worked tirelessly to open essential services and, while extremely difficult, they also ensured emergency services remained capable of responding during the storm. I would be remiss if I did not also mention the civilian employees who reported to duty through blizzard conditions to meet their essential duty requirements, while also ensuring their own homes and families were safe. This was truly an amazing accomplishment all around.”

Photo cutlines:

Fort Drum Public Works’ snow operations personnel work throughout a lake effect snowstorm to clear roads and buildings. On Nov. 22, two days after the last snow fall, Fort Drum returned to normal duty status with all essential services resuming support to the community. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Soldiers from the 91st Military Police Battalion’s 642nd Engineer Support Company had their heavy equipment in high gear on Nov. 21 to unbury Child and Youth Services’ buses and clear the parking lot at the South Riva Ridge Child Development Center. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

As foot after foot of snow fell – a total of 54 inches by the time the storm lifted – Fort Drum personnel worked tirelessly to manage the lake effect snowstorm that closed the post Nov. 18-21. Snow plows worked to keep access control points and main roads accessible, before concentrating on other critical roadways and buildings. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Media with inquiries regarding this press release should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs, Julie Halpin, 315-772-8286 or julie.a.halpin2.civ@army.mil.