Press Release

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Fort Drum Garrison Safety offers winter driving, snow blower operator course for community members

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- A smattering of snow in recent days and last night’s windstorm reminded Fort Drum community members how fast weather conditions can change in the North Country and served as a notice for those who weren’t quite ready for it.

“If you haven’t prepared for winter weather already, because it has been mild so far, now is the time,” said Jose Charneco, safety and occupational health specialist at the Garrison Safety Office. “As we’ve seen, it can change in one day.”

Charneco is the lead instructor for the Winter Driving Course, where he talks with Soldiers and family members about vehicle winterization and safe driving tips, what to include in an emergency kit, and how to avoid accidents.

So far, dozens of community members benefited from the training, which began in October and continues through March.

“The peak PCS (permanent change of station) season is usually around the fall timeframe, and that’s when we get a lot of the newer Soldiers and family members here,” Charneco said. “So, when we get that first snowfall, hopefully people realize the need to prepare and that’s why we offer this course.”

Having spent most of his time in the military in southern states, Charneco said it can be a shock to experience that first blast of winter up North.

“I came from North Carolina, and my whole military career was down South,” he said. “My first winter here, we had the winter washer fluid but then we never put it in the tank. So, we were traveling to Pennsylvania, and our reservoir froze because we never changed it.”

Rather than lecturing a class, Charneco said he prefers a more interactive forum to give attendees a chance to ask questions. His slide deck covers all the details people should know, but he includes a few personal stories and lessons learned.

“I like sharing my personal observations and experiences with people,” he said. “For example, have you ever gone to the mall and there’s just a few snowflakes falling? But then when you come out after seeing movie, and you have to dig your car out. That’s how fast conditions can change.”

At a minimum, Charneco said people should store a snowbrush and scraper, a small shovel and a bag of sand or kitty litter in their trunk to help get themselves out if ever stuck in the snow.

“But for longer trips, you’ll want to make sure you have a warm blanket, extra warm clothing, and extra food and water,” he said.

People should also consider having the following in their emergency kit:

\*Flashlight and batteries

\*Jumper cables

\*Hazard sign or flares

\*Extra windshield wiper fluid

He said his son learned a good lesson last year as a new driver, when his phone lost power and he had not packed a charger.

Speaking of smart phones, Charneco said the NYS 511 app is a great resource for real-time road and weather conditions, traffic and accident information, and live traffic camera feeds.

During the class, he explains how to prepare a vehicle for winter conditions. This includes checking fluid levels; replacing worn out wiper blades; and testing brakes, battery, and car lights. Charneco said, if nothing else, attendees leave the class with a better appreciation of what he calls “The 3 P's” – Prepare, Protect, and Prevent.

“Prepare for the winter, protect yourself, your family and your vehicle; and prevent any accidents,” he said.

The next class is scheduled from 2 to 3 p.m. Jan. 23, followed by a snow blower operation course from 3:15 to 4 p.m.

“We got a snow blower our first winter here,” Charneco said. “Because Day One, we shoveled. Then Day Two, we shoveled. On Day Three, we went to the store and bought a snow blower. But not everyone knows how to operate them, and the class gets people to understand that it’s more than just throwing snow around. If you aren’t taking proper safety precautions, you could get hurt.”

Classes are limited to 12, and people can register by calling the Garrison Safety Office at (315) 772-0310 or 772-3022. The office, previously on Wheeler-Sack Army Airfield, is located in Bldg. 4884, on Jones Street near the Fort Drum Range Branch.

Winter safety tips are available at [https://home.army.mil/drum/about/Garrison/safety-office/winter-safety-reources](https://usg01.safelinks.protection.office365.us/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fhome.army.mil%2Fdrum%2Fabout%2FGarrison%2Fsafety-office%2Fwinter-safety-reources&data=05%7C02%7Clisa.r.albrecht.civ%40army.mil%7C776c5e19e2324b723b4608dc1395a799%7Cfae6d70f954b481192b60530d6f84c43%7C0%7C0%7C638406780676880582%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=e2iFsID0I3Ba9bmMHOHYlARX9bDP6iFNp3MFnqVxnIM%3D&reserved=0).

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Photo Caption: Fort Drum community members can better prepare themselves for winter weather by registering for the Winter Driving Course and Snow Blower Operation Course at the Garrison Safety Office. The classes are held three times a month through March. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)