

# Plow Drivers Get Ready With High Tech Simulator

By Andy Greder, Duluth News Tribune, [www.duluthnewstribune.com](http://www.duluthnewstribune.com)

Nov 19, 2008 -- When Ken McCarthy@ssnowplow blew a tire last week, the St. Louis County driver didn't fret because he knew the consequences wouldn't be too serious.

McCarthy was behind the wheel of a high-tech snowplow simulation system that is preparing Northeastern Minnesota drivers for all the elements of winter weather. The snowplow simulator gives both rookie and veteran drivers a chance to experience everything their job entails, from glare ice and blizzard conditions to mechanical issues and other vehicles that get dangerously close to the plows.

"Anything that affects the truck, we can do," said Andy Kubista, simulator trainer.

McCarthy said the simulation of blowing a tire was similar to what he once experienced on the job.

"It is a good training device and a useful tool," said McCarthy, who has more than eight years of snowplow driving experience. "It is easier to recover from a catastrophe in the simulator than on the road."

This fall Minnesota became the fifth state to use this type of simulator, behind Utah, Colorado, Iowa and Montana. The simulation software was designed by MPRI, a subsidiary of L-3 Communications, which also produces simulators for the Department of Defense and other government agencies.

The \$568,000 simulator saves the Minnesota Department of Transportation an estimated \$100 per driver compared to the cost of on-the-road training. About 190 MnDOT drivers will use the simulator before it leaves Duluth for southern Minnesota on Friday.

"This provides real-world situations without the expense," Kubista said. "The drivers can ask, 'What do I do if I get in this situation?' without having to wait until it snows."

The simulator has three 42-inch plasma TVs to provide 270 degrees of viewing from the driver's seat. There's a steering wheel and a touch screen to control the plows, headlights and sander. The simulator is controlled by four computers that dictate the adverse weather conditions the drivers experience.

Besides helping snowplow drivers become reacquainted with their massive machines, MnDOT hopes the simulator improves public safety. MnDOT recorded 54 accidents between snowplows and motor vehicles in the 2006-2007 winter.

Inclement weather already has produced a fatality in Minnesota this winter. A 17-year-old boy was killed south of Le Center last week after his car collided head-on with a snowplow.

"You have to pay attention," said Carol Brotski, a safety officer with MnDOT. "You must be aware. And you must stay back."

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