Media Relations

323.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy provides guidelines for the release of official office information to the media. It also addresses coordinating media access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities.

323.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office to protect the privacy rights of individuals, while releasing non-confidential information to the media regarding topics of public concern. Information that has the potential to negatively affect investigations will not be released.

323.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

The ultimate authority and responsibility for the release of information to the media shall remain with the Sheriff. In situations not warranting immediate notice to the Sheriff and in situations where the Sheriff has given prior approval, Division Commanders, Shift Supervisors and designated Public Information Officers (PIOs) may prepare and release information to the media in accordance with this policy and applicable laws regarding confidentiality.

For procedures related to Responsibilities, see the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office LE Procedures Manual: Release of Information Responsibility and Cooperation with the News Media

323.4 PROVIDING ADVANCE INFORMATION

To protect the safety and rights of office members and other persons, advance information about planned actions by law enforcement personnel, such as movement of persons in custody or the execution of an arrest or search warrant, should not be disclosed to the media, nor should media representatives be invited to be present at such actions except with the prior approval of the Sheriff.

Any exceptions to the above should only be considered for the furtherance of legitimate law enforcement purposes. Prior to approving any exception, the Sheriff will consider, at a minimum, whether the release of information or the presence of the media would unreasonably endanger any individual or prejudice the rights of any person or is otherwise prohibited by law.

323.5 MEDIA REQUESTS

Any media request for information or access to a law enforcement incident shall be referred to the PIO, or if unavailable, to the first available supervisor. Prior to releasing any information to the media, members shall consider the following:

(a) At no time shall any member of this office make any comment or release any official information to the media without prior approval from a supervisor or the PIO.

(b) In situations involving multiple agencies or government departments, every reasonable effort should be made to coordinate media releases with the authorized

Copyright Lexipol, LLC 2026/11/02, All Rights Reserved.
Published with permission by St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office

representative of each involved agency prior to the release of any information by this office.

(c) Under no circumstance should any member of this office make any comment to the media regarding any law enforcement incident not involving this office without prior approval of the Sheriff. Under these circumstances the member should direct the media to the agency handling the incident.

323.6 ACCESS

Authorized media representatives shall be provided access to scenes of disasters, criminal investigations, emergencies and other law enforcement activities as required by law.

Access by the media is subject to the following conditions:

(a) The media representative shall produce valid media credentials that shall be prominently displayed at all times while in areas otherwise closed to the public.

(b) Media representatives should be prevented from interfering and may be removed for interfering with emergency operations and criminal investigations.

1. Based upon available resources, reasonable effort should be made to provide a safe staging area for the media that is near the incident and that will not interfere with emergency or criminal investigation operations. All information released to the media should be coordinated through the PIO or other designated spokesperson.

(c) Media interviews with individuals who are in custody should not be permitted without the approval of the Sheriff and the express written consent of the person in custody.

(d) No member of this office who is under investigation shall be subjected to media visits or interviews without the consent of the involved member.

For procedures related to Access, see the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office LE Procedures Manual: Media Access and Photography

323.6.1 CRITICAL OPERATIONS

A critical incident or tactical operation should be handled in the same manner as a crime scene, except the media should not be permitted within the inner perimeter of the incident, subject to any restrictions as determined by the supervisor in charge. Office members shall not jeopardize a critical incident or tactical operation in order to accommodate the media. All comments to the media shall be coordinated through a supervisor or the PIO.

323.6.2 TEMPORARY FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Whenever the presence of media or other aircraft pose a threat to public or member safety or significantly hamper incident operations, the field supervisor should consider requesting a Temporary Flight Restriction (TFR). All requests for a TFR should be routed through the Shift Supervisor. The TFR request should include specific information regarding the perimeter and altitude necessary for the incident and should be requested through the appropriate control tower.

Copyright Lexipol, LLC 2026/11/02, All Rights Reserved.
Published with permission by St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office

If the control tower is not known, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) should be contacted (14 CFR 91.137).

323.7 CONFIDENTIAL OR RESTRICTED INFORMATION

It shall be the responsibility of the PIO to ensure that confidential or restricted information is not inappropriately released to the media (see the Records Maintenance and Release and Personnel Records policies). When in doubt, authorized and available legal counsel should be consulted prior to releasing any information.

323.8 RELEASE OF INFORMATION

The Office may routinely release information to the media without receiving a specific request. This may include media releases regarding critical incidents, information of public concern, updates regarding significant incidents or requests for public assistance in solving crimes or identifying suspects. This information may also be released through the office website or other electronic data sources.

For procedures related to Release of Information, see the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office LE Procedures Manual: Release of Information and Process for Informational Releases

323.8.1 INFORMATION LOG

The Office will maintain a daily information log via the RSS Feeds attached to the county website of significant law enforcement activities. Log entries shall only contain information that is deemed public information and not restricted or confidential by this policy or applicable law.

Copyright Lexipol, LLC 2026/11/02, All Rights Reserved.
Published with permission by St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office