



ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

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COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY

James R. Guy, President
Mike Alderson, Jr., Commissioner
Eric S. Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Scott R. Ostrow, Commissioner

NEWS RELEASE *for Immediate Release*

No. 2026 – 010
January 23, 2026, 12 p.m.

Protecting Pets & Animals During Winter Storm Conditions

LEONARDTOWN, MD – St. Mary's County, Maryland is currently under a [Cold Weather Advisory and Winter Storm Warning](#). The Department of Emergency Services, Animal Services Division, reminds residents to take extra precautions to protect pets and animals from extreme cold, snow, and hazardous weather conditions.

Cold temperatures, ice, and heavy snowfall can pose serious risks to pets and outdoor animals. Residents are encouraged to bring pets indoors whenever possible and ensure animals have safe, warm shelter, fresh water, and adequate food.

Maryland Law & County Ordinance

Under Maryland Law, it is **prohibited to leave pets unattended outdoors** for more than 30 minutes when temperatures fall below 32°F, during extreme weather, or when weather warnings or advisories are in effect, with limited exceptions.

Additionally, under St. Mary's County ordinance, **all domestic animals are required to be brought indoors during any active weather advisory or warning** issued by the National Weather Service (NWS). Leaving a domestic animal outdoors during an active advisory or warning may be considered cruelty or neglect and is subject to enforcement action, even if the animal normally lives outdoors (*excluding livestock*). After an advisory is lifted, residents are reminded that the local ordinance also prohibits keeping any domestic animal outdoors without providing adequate shelter when the wind chill index is 32°F or lower.

Residents who are concerned about the welfare of an animal are encouraged to contact St. Mary's County Animal Control at (301) 475-8016 to report concerns or request assistance.

Follow these **Winter Safety Tips** to keep pets and animals safe:

Domestic Animals & Pets:

- Bring pets indoors during extreme cold, snow, or storms (*32°F or lower; NWS advisories*).
- Limit outdoor exposure and shorten walks during freezing temperatures.
- Check water bowls frequently to ensure they are not frozen.
- Wipe paws and fur after outdoor walks to remove ice, salt, and chemicals.
- Never leave pets unattended in vehicles or outdoors during dangerous conditions.

– MORE –



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Livestock:

- Provide appropriate shelter that blocks wind and moisture.
- Supply **additional dry bedding – Straw is recommended, not hay.** Straw is hollow and helps trap heat, while hay can retain moisture and increase the risk of freezing.
- Ensure constant access to unfrozen drinking water.
- Provide additional feed and, when appropriate, safe heat sources suitable for the species and breed.

Residents are also encouraged to **make pets part of** their household **emergency plans** by:

- Adding pet food, water, medications, and supplies to emergency kits.
- Keeping leashes, carriers, and identification readily available.
- Ensuring pets have current ID tags and microchip information.
- Identifying pet-friendly shelter options or alternate caregivers in advance.

By taking simple precautions and planning ahead, residents can help ensure the safety and well-being of pets and animals throughout the winter storm.

Community members are encouraged to use the following resources during severe weather:

- **Check for local road closures** at: www.stmaryscountymd.gov/RoadClosures
- **Report non-emergency issues**, such as downed trees via our 311 system at: www.stmaryscountymd.gov/SM311
- **Report power outages** to SMECO at: www.smeco.coop/Outages
- Visit www.stmaryscountymd.gov/Prepare for additional preparedness tips

Knowing what to do before, during, and after an emergency is a critical part of being prepared and may make all the difference when seconds count. To learn about potential disasters and hazards, and how to be prepared and stay informed, please visit: www.stmaryscountymd.gov/es.

For more information, please visit www.stmaryscountymd.gov or follow St. Mary's County Government on [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [Instagram](#) for regular updates.

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