

Disabled Vehicles

505.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy establishes guidelines for office members who provide assistance to motorists in disabled vehicles within the primary jurisdiction of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office.

505.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office to assist motorists with disabled vehicles until those vehicles are safely removed from the roadway. Members should take appropriate action to mitigate potential problems when a vehicle constitutes a traffic hazard, or the safety of the motorist is a concern. Deputies arriving on scene of a highway emergency will request the station clerk or dispatcher as appropriate to obtain the needed assistance (i.e., fire, medical, tow service). The deputy sheriff will remain with the motorist until the appropriate assistance arrives. If the needed assistance is mechanical and the scene is safe, the deputy sheriff does not need to remain on the scene.

505.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

When an on-duty member of this office or an off-duty member in an agency vehicle sees a disabled vehicle on the roadway, the member should make a reasonable effort to provide assistance. If this is not reasonably possible, the dispatcher should be advised of the location of the disabled vehicle and the need for assistance. The dispatcher should then assign another office member to respond as soon as practicable. Deputies assisting disabled motorists and who remain on scene for any length of time must address the safety of the motorist as well as their own safety. Deputies will comply with Federal Highway Administration Regulation (23CFR Part 634 Worker Visibility) and utilize the special equipment issued to them to enhance their safety. This equipment includes reflective traffic vest/clothing, flashlight or flares, and traffic cones.

To alert other officers that a disabled/unattended vehicle has been initially checked and to serve as an aid to follow-up action that may need to be taken, Assistance/Unattended Vehicle Check Tags (SMCSO Form #13) are carried by deputies and appropriately completed.

505.4 ASSISTANCE

In most cases, a disabled motorist will require assistance. After arrangements for assistance are made, continued involvement by Sheriff's Office members will be contingent on the time of day, the location, vulnerability of the disabled motorist, weather and the availability of Sheriff's Office resources. When circumstances preclude a deputy sheriff from remaining with a motorist, flares shall be placed to warn oncoming traffic, providing reasonable safety until the problem can be resolved.

The types of assistance provided to motorists by the Sheriff's Office include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Providing motorists with emergency assistance (i.e. changing a tire or pushing the vehicle to safety);

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- (b) Providing protection to stranded motorists;
- (c) Obtaining tow services and mechanical assistance; and
- (d) Providing directions and other public information.

Except in extreme life-threatening emergencies, agency vehicles are prohibited from being used to push disabled vehicles.

505.4.1 VEHICLE UNLOCKING DEVICES

Limitations on Use of Unlocking Device

Devices for unlocking door locks on vehicles (slim jims, BIG EASY Tool Kit, etc.) are used by deputy sheriffs in emergency situations only.

- (a) Emergencies are classified as:
 - 1. Child in a vehicle
 - 2. Animal in a vehicle
 - 3. A person in need of assistance in a vehicle
- (b) In the discretion of the deputy sheriff, the following circumstances could be considered emergency situations if extenuating circumstances prevail:
 - 1. Vehicle engine running
 - 2. Vehicle creating a traffic hazard
 - 3. Safety hazard involved
 - 4. Other emergency situations at the discretion of the Duty Officer

The BIG EASY tool kit will be issued to a deputy sheriff. Prior to use of the BIG EASY tool kit, the deputy sheriff is required to view the instructional material.

Vehicle Lockout Report Form (SMCSO Form #19) is submitted each time an unlocking device is used.

Deputy sheriffs do not recommend specific locksmith or automobile dealerships to assist the public with lock problems.

505.4.2 MECHANICAL REPAIRS

Office members shall not make mechanical repairs to a disabled vehicle.

505.4.3 RELOCATION OF DISABLED VEHICLES

The relocation of disabled vehicles by members of this office by pushing or pulling a vehicle should only occur when the conditions reasonably indicate that immediate movement is necessary to reduce a hazard presented by the disabled vehicle. Disabled vehicles will not be left on private property without the property owner's consent.

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505.4.4 RELOCATION OF DISABLED MOTORIST

The relocation of a disabled motorist should only occur with the person's consent and should be suggested when conditions reasonably indicate that immediate movement is necessary to mitigate a potential hazard. The office member may stay with the disabled motorist or transport him/her to a safe area to await pickup.

Transportation of a stranded motorist may be provided:

- (a) If the motorist's destination is within St. Mary's County.
- (b) If the stranded motorist's destination is not within the deputy sheriff's assigned patrol, they must first obtain authorization from the duty officer.
- (c) If the motorist is to be transported is of the opposite sex, the Emergency Communications Center will be provided with the beginning and ending odometer readings.

The deputy sheriff may have headquarters, or the emergency communications center contact a third party by telephone to assist the motorist or provide transportation.