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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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Maricopa County Confirms First Heat Death of the Season

PHOENIX (June 14, 2016) – As the Valley prepares for a record-breaking weekend of extreme temperatures, Maricopa County Department of Public Health has confirmed an older adult is the county’s first death due to heat-related illness this year. The woman, who was otherwise healthy, was found in her backyard in early June.

“This is a sad reminder about how seriously we need to take our heat here in the desert,” said Dr. Rebecca Sunenshine, medical director for the Disease Control Division at Maricopa County Department of Public Health. “Even being outdoors less than an hour can cause serious heat-related illness, especially among the most vulnerable populations, such as the elderly.”

While many heat related deaths occur outside, 40% occur indoors. The majority of those either don’t have their air conditioning turned on or it doesn’t function. Many people struggle with paying the AC bills in the summer time. Utility companies are sensitive to this fact and have programs to assist individuals. In addition, government and community-based organizations also have support services and cooling centers people can go to get out of the heat. Energy assistance programs and locations for water and refuge stations can be found at heataz.com.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more people die in the U.S from heat than from all other natural disasters combined. Last year, 84 heat associated deaths occurred in Maricopa County due to exposure to environmental heat.

People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to compensate and properly cool themselves. Common sense practices will keep you safe and healthy during the scorching days of summer including:

- Drink water before you get thirsty to prevent dehydration.
- Don’t rely on fans as your primary source of cooling
- Come indoors frequently to an air conditioned location to cool your core body temperature
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat, sunscreen, and lightweight clothes
- Never leave your kids, pets, and others who may rely on you inside of a parked car.
- Check on friends and neighbors, especially the elderly, to ensure sufficient cooling and supplies
- Seek medical care immediately if you have, or someone you know has, symptoms of heat-related illness like muscle cramps, headaches, vomiting, confusion, no longer sweating, and rapid heart rate

To sign up for heat alerts, or for more information on heat relief resources and how heat affects vulnerable populations, please visit heataz.com or caloraz.com.

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