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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

Dr. Sunenshine will be available for interviews today from 12:00-2:00pm. Please call to schedule.

Media Contact: Sonia Charry, Maricopa County Public Health, 602-679-3098

Maricopa County Confirms First Heat Death of the Season

PHOENIX (June 5, 2019) – As the Valley comes out of cooler-than-usual 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 man, who was without housing and dehydrated, was found in a vehicle.

“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 Disease Control at Maricopa County Department of Public Health. “Even when temperatures aren’t as high as we see in late summer, temperatures in the 80s and 90s can still lead to dehydration and be very dangerous. This is especially true for our most vulnerable populations, such as seniors and people without shelter.”

While many heat-associated 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. Utility companies are sensitive to this fact and have programs to assist individuals. In addition, government and community-based organizations have support services and cooling centers people can visit to cool down. Energy assistance programs, locations for water, and refuge stations can be found at heataz.com and caloraz.com.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more people die in the U.S. from heat than all other natural disasters combined. Last year, 182 heat-associated deaths occurred in Maricopa County due to exposure to environmental heat. This is the highest number of heat-associated deaths on record for Maricopa County.

People suffer heat-associated illness when their bodies are unable to compensate and properly cool themselves. Common-sense practices will keep you safe and healthy during the 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 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-associated illness like muscle cramps, headaches, vomiting, confusion, no longer sweating, and rapid heart rate

For heat relief resources, statistics, and information on how heat affects vulnerable populations, please visit heataz.com.