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CONTACT: Kelly Taft, MAG, (602) 452-5020

Valley Highways Seeing Less Litter

Elected Officials and Tourism Leaders Urge Spring Visitors to Keep Arizona Clean

PHOENIX (March 21, 2017)—New statistics released today indicate that a litter education program is having a positive effect on the volume of highway litter throughout Maricopa County. At a press conference this morning, elected officials and tourism leaders revealed that the volume of litter continues to decline along the Valley's freeways, emphasized the impact litter has on the economy and tourism, and encouraged spring visitors to keep Arizona clean.

The most recent statistics, mined from data collected by Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) maintenance crews, show that highway litter has decreased by about 50 percent since the 2006 launch of *Don't Trash Arizona*, a litter education program conducted by the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) in cooperation with ADOT. Over the first 10 years of the program, ADOT crews have gone from collecting 130,000 bags of roadside trash in 2006 to about 65,000 bags in 2016.

"We are seeing this improvement despite an increase in population and lane miles, and the same number of crews working on collection," said Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton. "The *Don't Trash Arizona* message is having an impact."

At the start of the *Don't Trash Arizona* program, maintenance crews were collecting 500 bags of roadside trash each weekday. That dropped to about 250 in 2016. In 2006, about 1.6 million pounds of trash were collected from the Valley's highways, while in 2016 the volume dropped to about 788,000 pounds.

"Eliminating freeway litter is one way we can keep not only tourists, but businesses, coming back to our state," said Tempe Mayor Mark Mitchell. "It's critical that we get the message out about discouraging littering to everyone. Whether longtime residents or weekend visitors, it's up to all of us to keep Arizona clean and beautiful."

Don't Trash Arizona is a result of Proposition 400, which provided funding for landscape maintenance, litter control and a new litter education campaign. On average, it costs taxpayers about \$3 million every year—about 150,000 hours of labor—to pick up trash from Maricopa County freeways alone. Beyond the monetary expense, litter also is dangerous, as about 125 people die in debris-related car accidents nationwide each year.

Litter also impacts worker productivity for those stuck in traffic as a result of debris-related incidents, and it can affect tourism.

"We all know Arizona has a stunning landscape, with picturesque mountains and gorgeous sunsets, which is why it is important to keep litter from cluttering the view," Arizona Office of Tourism Deputy Director Stephanie Dowling said. "The way visitors view Arizona is vitally important to their memorable experiences of our amazing state and, we urge both our visitors and residents to keep Arizona beautiful. Not only does it make an impression on our visitors, but it enhances the quality of life for our residents."

The perception of the Valley's litter problem has also improved as litter has decreased. In 2006, about 80 percent of residents believed highway litter was a big or moderate problem. That percentage dropped to 62 percent in 2016.

"Our industry is built on first impressions, and I applaud Arizona residents and visitors for the incredible strides made in eradicating freeway litter," said Kim Sabow, President and CEO of the Arizona Lodging & Tourism Association. "I will continue to champion our collective efforts, which have resulted in solutions that showcase the enviable environment we enjoy in Arizona, and that is a memory we want every business traveler and vacationer to take home and share."

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