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PRESS RELEASE

**Carfentanil Arrives in Chester County - -
Phoenixville Man Arrested For Drug Delivery Resulting in Death**

The Chester County District Attorney's Office and Chester County Coroner's Office announced that the presence of carfentanil, a synthetic narcotic used to tranquilize elephants, has been confirmed in a Chester County overdose death. As a result of that overdose death, a Phoenixville man has been arrested by the Phoenixville Borough Police Department for Drug Delivery Resulting in Death and related charges.

Dr. Gordon Eck, Chester County Coroner, stated, "Carfentanil is an extremely potent synthetic opioid that is often disguised as heroin or mixed with heroin. Carfentanil is incredibly dangerous because it is 10,000 times more powerful than heroin and 100 times more powerful than fentanyl. Because of the drug's potency and its ability to be absorbed through the skin, only properly trained and equipped professionals should handle any substance suspected to contain carfentanil. If you suspect that you have been exposed to carfentanil, seek immediate medical attention."

Phoenixville Police Chief Tom Sjostrom stated, "This was great work by our officers who were able to follow through and make the arrest. We will continue to work with the Chester County District Attorney's Office in an effort to combat this new threat to our community and first responders. Our officers have to take extra precautions

knowing that any contact with heroin might also mean contact with carfentanil, which could have deadly consequences.”

District Attorney Tom Hogan stated, “Drug traffickers and drug users are engaged in a vicious cycle. The addicts, with their bodies and brains desensitized by repeated drug use, need stronger and stronger drugs to keep up their high. The drug dealers are only too happy to sell the addicts stronger drugs, like carfentanil, regardless of the risks. The end result is more money for the dealers and more dead bodies on the streets.”

The defendant is Damon Alfred Eskridge of Railroad Street, Phoenixville, PA. The defendant is 20 years old.

The allegations from the criminal complaint are as follows:¹

On July 4, 2017, Phoenixville Police Officers were dispatched for a possible heroin overdose to a home on Second Avenue, Phoenixville, Chester County, Pennsylvania. Upon arrival, investigators found a 34 year-old male unresponsive. The scene was secured and the male was declared deceased by medical personnel.

During a search of the deceased’s bedroom, investigators found numerous empty heroin bags stamped “New Arrival,” “Chapo,” and “Wells Fargo.” Investigators also seized four “New Arrival” bags still containing suspected heroin. There was a used hypodermic needle, commonly used to “shoot up” heroin, found next to the dead body.

Investigators then located the overdose victim’s cellular telephone. They conducted an examination of the phone and determined that the overdose victim had been purchasing his heroin from “Kevin D.”

On July 5, 2017, Phoenixville Police communicated with “Kevin D” via text messaging. The police arranged for “Kevin D” to deliver 12 bags (commonly referred to as a “bundle”) of heroin at St. Mary’s Street and South Street in Phoenixville Borough.

When “Kevin D” arrived in the area of St. Mary’s Street and South Street, the police requested he deliver the heroin to their car. As “Kevin D” approached the undercover police car, he was taken into custody. “Kevin D” possessed twelve bags of heroin, exactly what the police had ordered. The bags were stamped “New Arrival,” identical to the bags found in the overdose victim’s home.

¹ A criminal defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in court.

“Kevin D” was then identified by the police as the defendant, Damon Eskridge. The defendant also possessed six additional bags of heroin stamped “New Arrival,” \$274.74 in U.S. currency, and a cellular telephone. On July 5, 2017, Eskridge was charged with Possession With the Intent to Deliver Drugs, Criminal Use of a Communication Facility, Dealing in Proceeds of Unlawful Activity, and related charges. The defendant posted bail and was released.

The Chester County Coroner’s Office completed an autopsy of the deceased. Subsequent toxicology results revealed the presence of carfentanil in the blood of the overdose victim. On July 17, 2017, the Chester County Coroner’s Office declared that the overdose victim’s death was caused by acute carfentanil toxicity.

On July 18, 2017, based on the toxicology findings, the Phoenixville Police issued a second criminal complaint for the defendant charging him additionally with Drug Delivery Resulting in Death. The defendant was arrested. MDJ Ted Michaels set bail at \$1,000,000 cash and the defendant was remanded to Chester County Prison.

This is the first reported appearance of carfentanil in Chester County. Carfentanil is a Schedule II controlled substance, commonly used as a tranquilizing agent for elephants, horses, and other large animals. It is known on the street as “gray death.” Carfentanil is extremely dangerous to humans, often causing nearly instantaneous cardiovascular collapse and death. Naloxone, the drug used to reverse opioid overdoses, has limited effectiveness against carfentanil. Carfentanil appeared in Western Pennsylvania earlier this year, made its way to the Harrisburg area in Central Pennsylvania a couple of months ago, and recently has been showing up in overdoses in the Philadelphia area.

Carfentanil also poses a significant danger to police, first responders, and medical personnel. Carfentanil comes in many forms, including powder, blotter paper, or spray, and can be absorbed through the skin or accidental inhalation. Drug dealers also have been using pill presses to market the drug in pill form, often sold on the street as if it was Oxycodone. Carfentanil can be lethal to humans in amounts less than one milligram.

District Attorney Hogan added, “Think of a couple of grains of salt. That is the amount of carfentanil that can kill a drug user looking for a new high or a police officer unlucky enough to accidentally ingest the drug. In Chester County, we are working together every day to keep this poison out of our homes, schools, and businesses.”

The lead charge in this case is Drug Dealing Resulting in Death. That charge carries a maximum sentence of 20-40 years imprisonment. However, because there are

no mandatory minimum sentences in Pennsylvania, the Commonwealth is uncertain regarding how much prison time the defendant actually will face.

The Phoenixville Police Department's investigation was assisted by the Chester County Detectives. The cases will be prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Kevin Pierce of the Chester County Drug and Organized Crime Unit. Anybody with any further information should contact Phoenixville Police Officer Anthony Duchnosky at (610) 933-8801.

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Approved for release:

Thomas P. Hogan