

Controlled Vocabulary on Disaster Terminology: A Conceptual Tool for Information Retrieval

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Vocabulary of controlled indexing language, formally organized so that, a priori, relationships between concepts are established to be used in information retrieval systems

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A controlled vocabulary is a tool used mainly to improve processes for indexing and retrieving information from a number of sources, and to establish a control of the terms to be used in a specific area. In addition, this controlled vocabulary allows for the establishment of a searching strategy through the use of standardized terms.

By standardizing the terminology used in a specific field, this controlled vocabulary seeks to facilitate the creation of objective conditions required to advance cooperation and the exchange and transfer of information among countries — particularly in a given geographic region that shares the same language but varies or modifies the same concepts.

Along these lines, the Regional Disaster Information Center for Latin America and the Caribbean (CRID) has developed the Disasters Controlled Vocabulary (DCV). This document represents the efforts made by CRID in order to provide people and institutions from different fields and that are working on disaster-related issues with a tool for indexing and retrieving relevant documents, as well as for standardizing terms used in this field. Through these two tasks, VCD users will be able to use a standardized terminology to disseminate their experiences or elaborate information products in such a controlled language that may also improve the exchange of knowledge.

The DCV is a tool for content analysis of bibliographic information which may be used as reference material on disaster terminology. This thesaurus is composed of a total of 951 terms structured in a hierarchical fashion. Each term is available in three different languages (Spanish, English and Portuguese) and most of them also include definitions and scope notes.

Currently, the DCV is being used by CRID's information management staff for indexing its bibliographic collection. This process allows for the identification of concepts that describe the information gathered within its DISASTER database, which includes bibliographic and audiovisual

material, as well as electronic files. CRID expects that, in addition to serve as reference material, the DCV becomes a valuable tool for experts in different areas who may require a thesaurus to prepare reports or scientific publications, as well as for translators and editors of bibliographic material. Through their daily work aimed at indexing, searching for and having access to new bibliography in the field of disasters, CRID professional staff –who compiled most of the terms included in this thesaurus-, try to discover expressions in each language which may be considered descriptors or a new term for the DCV. Once a term is identified, a definition applied to disasters or related fields is included.

It is worth mentioning that, in order to develop this DCV, CRID received valuable contributions from experts in disasters and other related areas, which enriched the thesaurus with new terms. In addition, existing terms were reviewed and scope notes were included. Initially conceived as a document that would facilitate the process of indexing and locating CRID's general collection (which currently has more than 15,000 entries), the DCV is now being offered as a product intended for promoting standardized terminology in the field of disasters, and as a guide for documentation centers that manage this type of information, to enable them to create their own databases.

The version already published includes terms in Spanish, organized in three different sections:

- Term hierarchy (structured by levels which presents all terms according to general and specific categories);
- Alphabetical list of terms; and,
- A CD Rom containing the Disaster Controlled Vocabulary (DCV): preliminary version.

In order to continue updating this thesaurus, CRID welcomes the submission of terms, which must meet the following requirements:

- Be mentioned in at least three documents. Their bibliographic references must be also included.
- Include the scope note (definition) of each new term, and quote the source from which it was taken.
- Include synonyms and other related terms.
- Place the term under the corresponding thematic category (according to the term hierarchy established).

- If the term is included in Spanish or in English, the translation into one of these languages must be included as well. If the term proposed is in Portuguese or French, its translation into English (at least) must be included.

For further information or to obtain a CD-ROM of the full-text version of this thesaurus, please contact CRID at crid@crid.or.cr, or visit http://www.crid.or.cr/crid/ing/vocabulario_controlado_ing.html and go to *Listado Alfabético de Términos* (Alphabetical List of Terms) to download the corresponding PDF file.