

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Disaster Planning & Recovery Website Glossary

Biological Disasters – A disaster of organic origin which is caused and/or spread by living organisms or other disaster types. Examples include bacteria, viruses, parasites, venomous organisms, poisonous plants and fungi, toxic gases, and harmful chemicals.

Carcinogenicity - the ability of a substance to cause cancer.

Climatological Disasters – events that are brought about by drastic fluctuations of climate states and variabilities; drought, extreme heat, extreme cold, wildfire; could be attributed to any natural disaster as climate change is making them occur more frequently and more violently.

Cause – the reason why something, like a disaster, happens.

CCAHA – [Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts](#)

CoCoRaHS – [Community Collaborative Rain, Hail & Snow Network](#)

Cyber Attack – “any kind of malicious activity that attempts to collect, disrupt, deny, degrade, or destroy information system resources or the information itself.”¹

DC – District of Columbia

DOD – [Department of Defense](#)

Drought – a lack of precipitation for a prolonged time that results in a shortage of water in an area. Droughts can occur in any region across the United States, but regions with minimal rainfall and scarce water supply are more susceptible to droughts.

Duration – “the length of time that something lasts.”²

Earthquake – a sudden shift or movement of the earth’s tectonic plates, generally occurring along fault lines, or the point of connection between two plates.

EF – Enhanced Fujita Scale, used to assign a tornado a 'rating' based on estimated wind speeds and related damage, ranges from EF-0 to EF-5.

EPA – [Environmental Protection Agency](#)

Epicenters – the location where an earthquake originates on the earth’s surface.

Extreme Temperatures – heat waves and cold waves that are more extreme than an area’s normal averages.³

FEMA – [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#)

¹ “Cyber Attack,” National Institute of Standards and Technology, Computer Security Resource Center (CSRC). Accessed September 11, 2024. https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/cyber_attack

² “Duration,” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed July 23, 2024. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/duration>.

³ https://mdgs.un.org/unsd/environment/Climatological_disasters.htm

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Floods – “a temporary overflow of water onto land that is normally dry.”⁴

Frequency – “the number of times something happens within a particular period.”⁵

Geophysical Disasters – disasters brought about by tectonic and seismic activity below the earth’s surface. Examples include earthquakes, volcanic activity, emissions or eruptions, and related events such as landslides, rockslides, surface collapses, and debris or mud flow.

Hurricane – “massive storm systems that form over warm ocean waters and move toward land.”⁶

Hydrological Disasters – disasters that occur in relation to water, including flooding, waves and tsunamis, storm surges, and other hazards driven by water dynamics such as mud slides. They are also characterized as a sudden and violent event caused due to the change in the quality, distribution, or movement of water below the surface or in the atmosphere.

Intensity – “the quality of being felt strongly or having a very strong effect; the strength of something that can be measured such as light, sound, etc.”⁷

JHU – [Johns Hopkins University](#)

Kepone – also called chlordecone, it is a neurotoxic organochlorine, nonbiodegradable insecticide.

La Niña – the periodic cooling of ocean surface temperatures in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific.

Longevity – “the ability to last for a long time.”⁸

Magnitude – “large size,” for earthquakes, magnitude is “a measure of how strong or violent” the earthquake is.⁹

Meteorological Disasters – A disaster that originates in the earth’s atmosphere, often referred to as “weather-related” disasters. These include hurricanes, tornadoes, intense storms, and may cause other hazards driven by weather such as temperatures, wildfires, and flash floods.

⁴ FEMA, “Flood,” FEMA Preparedness Community. Accessed July 22, 2024.

<https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Flood#:~:text=Flooding%20is%20a%20temporary%20over%20flow,on%20the%20hazard's%20Information%20Sheet>.

⁵ “Frequency,” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed July 23, 2024.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/frequency>

⁶ FEMA, “Hurricane,” FEMA Preparedness Community. Accessed July 23, 2024.

<https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Hurricane-What>

⁷ “Intensity,” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed July 23, 2024.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/intensity>

⁸ “Longevity,” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed September 11, 2024.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/longevity>

⁹ “Magnitude,” Cambridge Dictionary. Accessed July 23, 2024.

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/magnitude>

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NCPTT – [National Center for Preservation Technology & Training](#)

NFIP – [National Flood Insurance Program](#)

NLM – [National Library of Medicine](#)

NOAA – [National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration](#)

NPS – [National Park Service](#)

NWS – [National Weather Service](#)

Pathogenicity – the ability of a microorganism to cause disease.

Resilience / Resiliency – anticipating, preparing for, and responding to hazardous events, specifically those related to climate change or disasters.

Saffir-Simpson Scale – a 1 to 5 category rating based on a hurricane's sustained wind speed and estimates potential property damage.

Seismic Waves – vibrations caused by earthquakes that travel through the Earth.

Storm Surge - “an abnormal rise of water, generated by a storm, over and above normal tides.”¹⁰

Technological Disasters – A disaster that is caused by a technological failure or a human error related to handling technology. Examples include oil spills, terrorism, vandalism, nuclear disasters, dam failures, industrial pollution, transportation accidents, and other incidents involving technology.

Thunderstorm – “dangerous storms that include lighting, powerful winds, create lightening and hail, and cause flash flooding and tornadoes.”¹¹

Tornado – “violently rotating columns of air that extend from a thunderstorm to the ground.”¹²

Tsunami – “a series of enormous ocean waves caused by earthquakes, underwater landslides, volcanic eruptions, or asteroids.”¹³

UN – [United Nations](#)

US – United States

¹⁰ FEMA, “Lesson Summary: Lesson 4,” from “IS-321 Hurricane Mitigation Basics for Mitigation Staff,” (2013). Accessed July 22, 2024. <https://emilms.fema.gov/IS321/HM0104summary.html>

¹¹ FEMA, “Thunderstorm, Lightning, and Hail,” FEMA Preparedness Community, Accessed July 23, 2024. <https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Tornado>

¹² FEMA, “Tornado,” FEMA Preparedness Community. Accessed July 23, 2024. <https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Tornado>

¹³ FEMA, “Tsunami,” FEMA Preparedness Community. Accessed July 22, 2024. <https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Tsunami>.

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USFS – [United States Fire Service](#)

USMC – [United States Marine Corps](#)

VDEM – [Virginia Department of Emergency Management](#)

VDH – [Virginia Department of Health](#)

VDHR – [Virginia Department of Historic Resources](#)

VIMS – [Virginia Institute of Marine Science](#)

Virulence – the severity of a disease, its ability to overcome defenses and cause damage.

Wildfire – unexpected and uncontrolled fires that burn in natural areas such as a forest, grasslands, and plains, stemming from either natural or human causes. Both droughts and wildfires are most prevalent from summer through fall as heightened temperatures contribute to dry conditions.¹⁴

Winter Weather - a broad category of events encompassing a variety of hazardous conditions such as snowstorms, ice storms, freezing rain, blizzards, and extreme cold temperatures.

¹⁴ Universal Class, “Preparing for Climatological Disasters for Risk Reduction in Business,” <https://www.universalclass.com/articles/business/preparing-for-climatological-disasters-for-risk-reduction-in-business.htm> (accessed 5 June 2024); City of Norfolk, “Winter Storms and Nor’easters,” <https://www.norfolk.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1361> (accessed 5 June 2024); National Weather Service, “Winter Storms and Blizzards,” <https://www.weather.gov/fgz/WinterStorms> (accessed 5 June 2024); National Weather Service, “Winter Weather Preparedness Week for Virginia,” <https://www.weather.gov/akq/WinterWeatherAwarenessWeek> (accessed 5 June 2024); National Integrated Drought Information System, “Drought Basics,” <https://www.drought.gov/what-is-drought/drought-basics> (accessed 5 June 2024); FEMA Preparedness Community, “Wildfire | What,” <https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Wildfire-What> (accessed 5 June 2024).