

The Leaning Tower of Jasper: A South Carolina Apartment Building HOA Sues the Builders and Engineers of Their Building

On Saturday, February 28th, 2026, East Jasper Residential HOA sued Apex Structural Engineering, Inc, and Metro Builders LLC as a civil case in the Richland County Central Court. Jasper Residential Tower is a 30-story residential High-rise. Apex Structural Engineering Inc designed the Jasper Residential building and Metro Builders LLC constructed the apartment building. An architectural student became interested in the building while conducting independent wind load research. The student discovered that the tower's unique "elevated column" was vulnerable to quartering winds due to cost-saving weld substitutions. The student then notified one of the plaintiff's witnesses, Dr. Rowan Hightower, of this problem. Dr. Hightower then notified Apex's lead engineer, Samuel Greene who acted as a whistleblower and leaked internal calculations confirming the structural risk. East Jasper Residential HOA and the building's property owner filed suit alleging negligence, breach of contract, and breach of fiduciary duty.

The plaintiff started the trial describing the East Jasper Residential Tower as a "Tower of Cards waiting to be knocked over by the wind" because of the way it was built. While the defense compared the lawsuit to the story of Chicken Little, claiming that the plaintiff said the tower was falling when it really wasn't.

Both sides brought three witnesses to the stand. The plaintiff brought Reed Alvarez, Plaintiff – HOA president; Dr. Ellis Chen, structural engineer; and Dr. Rowan Hightower, structural engineer. The defense brought Cam Marinez, Defense – Project manager, Metro Builders LLC; Whitley Carter, Retired City Inspector; and Dr. Ash Forrester, structural engineer. The most focused topics and exhibits were quartering

winds, welded connections, bolted shear connections, the students' summary, Dr. Hightower's reports, and the building's certificate of occupation. Quartering wind, mostly discussed by Dr. Chen who specializes in aerodynamics and wind, is wind that blows diagonally and hits a building at a corner. Welded connections and bolted shear connections were discussed by both sides witnesses that were included in the building process. During construction Apex substituted bolted shear connections with welded connections. According to the defendants, this saved money and time on the construction while maintaining safety.

The plaintiffs stated in their closing argument that Apex and Metro Builders used bolted shear connections to save costs, that they put costs over safety; therefore, not keeping their promises to safety, supporting the idea that the tower was a house of cards that appeared to be intact. The plaintiff stated that the defense claimed that they were overreacting, but how could they be when lives and safety are at risk. They even came back into rebuttal stated that this case should not be compared to a fictional story because this case is not fictional. The defense closed their argument by calling the plaintiff paranoid. That the plaintiff put panic over purpose and fear over facts. They compared Reed Alvarez to Chicken Little saying there was a "cry without cause". They also stated that if there were true safety concerns the city would have come to inspect the building again and that their trust should not be in the work of a college student. That the plaintiff wasted 23 million dollars in retrofits when they were not needed. A decision has not yet been made on the outcome of this trial.