

Catastrophic Collapse: Lessons Learned, After the Fall

Unsettling Exhibition at the District Architecture Center on What We Learn when Structures Fail

Washington DC — *Catastrophic Collapse: Lessons Learned, After the Fall*, on view at the District Architecture Center through July 27, explores what we can learn when structures such as bridges, buildings, and dams fail. The exhibition highlights eight well documented structural failure case studies and the lessons learned in the wake of their collapse.



The Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapsed on November 7, 1940, due to high winds.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-46682 (b&w film copy neg.)

Buildings, bridges, and other infrastructure are essential elements of our daily lives, and collapses are rare but can happen for a host of reasons: earthquakes, extreme weather, human error, or a combination of factors. Fortunately, the lessons we learn from building failures make us all safer.

Architects and engineers work together to create structures that protect the public's health, safety, and welfare, applying widely accepted standards for design and construction integrity. But what happens when disaster strikes, and catastrophic collapse follows from structural failure?

Inspired by the collapse of Champlain Towers South in Surfside, Florida, in 2021, the exhibition features some of our nation's most catastrophic structural disasters—from the South Fork Dam and Tacoma Narrows Bridge to the Northridge Meadows Apartments and the World Trade Center.

Each case study explores what happened, why, and how it changed the way structures are designed today. Visitors can also access videos detailing personal accounts, news reports, or engineering analysis that supports the research to help tell the story of each collapse.



Champlain Towers South partially collapsed on June 24, 2021.
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, [Public domain](#), via Wikimedia Commons



Catastrophic Collapse: Lessons Learned, After the Fall is organized by AIA|DC for the SIGAL Gallery at the District Architecture Center. The exhibition is generously sponsored by the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) and the District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) with additional support provided by AIA|DC's Sustaining Firm Affiliate Members.

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About the District Architecture Center

The District Architecture Center is home to AIA|DC and the Washington Architectural Foundation with programming that engages architects, architectural enthusiasts, allied professionals, students, and the public. We spotlight excellence in architecture, design, and urbanism; explore and disseminate inspiring artistic and architectural ideas; and pique curiosities about the man-made world around us. These experiences offer a platform for dialogue on the nature of contemporary design practice, the role of architecture in our communities, and the many ways that design impacts people's lives.

General Information

District Architecture Center
421 7th Street NW Washington, DC 20004
aiadc.com | 202.347.9403

Exhibition Inquiries

Scott Clowney, Assoc. AIA
Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs
sclowney@aiadc.com | 202.347.9403

Gallery Hours

Tuesday thru Thursday	Free Admission
12–5pm*	No appointment necessary; walk-ins welcome

*Closed occasionally for private events; check the website for details or call ahead.

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