

ZACHARY D. KATES, P.E., S.E., LEED AP

Senior Principal



Summary

Zach Kates joined Thornton Tomasetti in 1998 and, for approximately 18 years, specialized in the management, structural analysis and design of complex building structures, including new design of large scale commercial and healthcare projects, and the renovation of existing and historic structures. Since 2010, Zach has focused on growing Thornton Tomasetti's Forensic Engineering practice. Currently, he leads the Forensic practice in Texas. He has performed numerous forensic engineering investigations, including damage assessment of existing facilities, cause and origin analysis of building and bridge failures, evaluation of construction defects, and building envelope assessment. He has been involved in emergency response for several building and bridge collapses, including stabilization and deconstruction, and has performed remedial design for failed structures.

Areas of Technical Expertise

- Structural Engineering
- Forensic Engineering
- Collapse Investigations
- Building Envelope Investigations

Education

- M.S., Civil Engineering, 1998, University of Texas
- B.S., Civil Engineering, 1996, University of Illinois

Registrations and Certifications

- Licensed Professional Engineer in AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, DE, DC, FL, LA, MD, MS, NC, ND, NM, OH, OK, SC, TX, VA and WI
- Licensed Structural Engineer in OK
- LEED Accredited Professional
- Mine Safety Health Administration Part 46 Safety Training
- Recognized Structural Engineer in the Florida Structural Engineer Recognition Program

Professional Activities

- Structural Engineers Association of Metropolitan Washington (SEA-MWV), Chairman 2015-2016
- Catholic University of America, Department of Civil Engineering Advisory Board, 2012
- Architectural Studio Jury Member, University of Maryland School of Architecture, Fall Semester 2006 and 2007
- Visiting Faculty, Structures 3, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 2001-2004
- Graduate Teaching Assistant, The University of Texas at Austin, 1997

Select Project Experience

Structural Engineering

Station Place Building One, Washington, DC. Structural design of the Securities and Exchange Commission's 1,000,000-square-foot headquarters. The 10-story office building features post-tensioned, two-way concrete slabs with 45-foot spans, an anticlastic glass cable-net lobby enclosure, and incorporates blast-resistant design consistent with General Services Administration security criteria. Provides direct access to neighboring Union Station via a steel truss pedestrian bridge.

Martin Army Community Hospital

, Fort Benning, GA.

Structural design of a 745,000-square-foot design-build facility for the U.S. Army, including a 70-bed hospital, 3-story concourse and a clinic building.

The Johns Hopkins Hospital, Bloomberg Children's Center and Sheikh Zayed Tower, Baltimore, MD. Structural design of a 1.6-million-square-foot hospital with a 12-story children's and maternal health tower and a 12-story critical care adult tower.

Reston Station, Building OB1, Reston, VA. Structural design of an award-winning 15-level, 620,000-square-foot building with noted designer Helmut Jahn that includes post-tensioned, two-way concrete slabs with 15-foot cantilevers, 40-foot spans, and a diagonalized, exposed concrete exoskeleton system.

Exploration Tower at Port Canaveral

, Cape Canaveral, FL.

Structural design of an award-winning 7-story, 22,000-square-foot welcome center located in a high-wind region.

Forensic Engineering

Pre-engineered Metal Building Collapse, FL. Structural engineering evaluation to determine the cause and origin of the collapse of a 25,000-square-foot warehouse structure during construction.

Ceiling Panel Collapse Investigation, Houston, TX. Performed structural engineering evaluation to determine the cause and origin of failure of an architectural panelized ceiling.

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Petrochemical Plant Process Unit Foundation Investigation, WI. Performed structural foundation analysis to determine adequacy of process unit foundations following a fire event at a petrochemical plant.

Manufacturing Building Explosion and Collapse Investigation, Monterrey, MX. Performed a structural scope of damage assessment and cause and origin investigation of the explosion in a steel-framed manufacturing building.

Steel Building Collapse Investigation, TX. Performed a structural scope of damage assessment and cause and origin investigation of the collapse of a long-span, high-bay pre-engineered metal building under construction.

Hospital Explosion Investigation, TX. Performed a structural damage assessment of several buildings on a hospital campus subject to blast loads from an explosion. Work involved stabilizing collapsed portions of the structure and forensic evaluation of remaining structural components.

Earthquake Evaluations, Mexico City, MX. Performed damage assessment of multiple commercial structures affected by the 2017 Mexico City earthquake. Performed structural analysis of lateral force resisting systems to determine compliance with current codes and designed seismic retrofits.

Warehouse Collapse Investigation, Austin, TX. Collapse investigation of precast tilt-up structure following Hurricane Harvey.

Fire Evaluations, multiple locations. Performed damage assessment of multiple commercial structures affected by fire. Work included design of stabilization, recommended replacement scope, and repair design.

Roof Mezzanine Structural Evaluation, Laurel, MD. Structural investigation and load testing of an interstitial mechanical mezzanine at a manufacturing plant.

South Norfolk Jordan Bridge Construction Collapse, Chesapeake, VA. Structural investigation of a 5,375-foot-long, 35-span, precast segmental bridge to determine the cause and origin of the steel truss support system's collapse.

Dulles International Airport, Dulles Jet Center Investigation, Dulles, VA. Structural investigation of three pre-engineered metal hangars that collapsed during a record-breaking snowfall in early 2010.

Building Envelope Investigations

Hurricane Evaluations for Harvey, Irma, Laura and Michael, multiple locations. Structural and building envelope investigations of various types of commercial, residential and government buildings to determine damage caused by wind, water infiltration, flood and storm surge as a result of hurricane activity in the affected areas.

Wind and Hail Evaluations, multiple locations. Building envelope investigations of various types of commercial and residential buildings to determine damage caused by wind and hail as a result of extreme weather events in the affected areas. Roofing systems evaluated included asphalt shingle, metal tile, metal panel, clay tile, concrete tile, TPO, PVC, EPDM and other various finish and cladding systems.

Sworn Testimony

Deposition Experience

Liberty Landing Homeowner Ass'n, Inc. v. Canopus US Ins., Inc., et al., involving a scope of damage dispute from damage due to hurricane Ida. June 4, 2025.

Blueridge Transp. Grp., LLC v. The Houston Parks Board, Millis Dev. & Constr., Inc, n/k/a Millis D&C Inc., involving the failure investigation for a collapsed soil nail retaining wall. October 21, 2024.

EPT Montecillo Town Ctr. Apartments, LLC v. EMJ Corp., n/k/a EMJ Constr., LLC, et al, involving investigation of design defects for a large multi family residential development. August 2024.

Park7 Dev., LLC v. Big Red Dog, Inc., involving the evaluation of the performance of the project structural engineer on a multi-level multifamily project. 419th Judicial District Court, Travis County, TX. February 2024.

Navarre v. Indian Harbor Ins. Co., involving the extent of damage attributable to Hurricane Laura for a residential property located in Lake Charles, LA. US District Court, Western District of Louisiana, Lake Charles Division. March 2023.

North Frazier Dev., LLC et al v. Paramount Eng'rs, LLC et al, involving construction defects and related structural inspections for two multi-story steel and wood framed buildings located in Conroe, TX. Harris County, 133rd Judicial District Court. February 2023.

HSU Equity, Inc. v. Round Rock Indep. Sch. Dist., involving the structural evaluation for a roof replacement of a school building. 26th Judicial District Court, Williamson County, TX. November 2019.

LMIC A/S/O Landow & Co Mgmt., Inc. v. Clark Constr. Grp., involving testimony regarding the extent of damage and construction of an existing brick façade for a multi-story concrete residential building in Bethesda, MD. January 2019.

Masonry Structure Collapse Investigation, Washington, DC. Investigation to determine cause of masonry wall collapse at a 3-story structure. U.S. District Court, Alexandria, VA. March 2016.

Commercial Office Building, Washington, DC. Structural investigation of impacts of new construction adjacent to an existing building. DC Superior Court. November 2014.

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Deposition Experience Continued

Intermodal Transportation Facility, Beckley, WV. Structural investigation of a project involving standard of care of construction administration services. U.S. District Court in Atlanta, GA. March 2014.

Trial Experience

Bain and Assoc. Inc., et al v. John C. Flood of Virginia Inc., Alexandria, VA. Structural investigation of an historic wood-framed structure to determine structural impacts of added rooftop mechanical equipment. Alexandria, VA Circuit Court. July 2004.

Arbitration Experience

Parc Traditions, LP v. Rogers-O'Brien Constr. Co., LLC, involving investigation of construction defects for a large assisted living development. American Arbitration Association in Austin. June 2024.

Haselden Resort Constructors, LLC v. PaulsCorp, LLC, et al, involving testimony regarding structural design and construction issues of reinforced balcony slabs for a multi-story residential building in Denver, CO. JAMS Case. December 2021.

Austin Maint. and Constr., Inc. v. Airliquide Large Indus., U.S. LP involving the construction and repair of a turbine base in Saint James, LA. American Arbitration Association in Houston. July 2021.

Haselden v. Pauls Corp., JAMS Arbitration Proceedings; Denver, CO. Provided engineering evaluation and expert witness testimony for arbitration proceedings related to alleged construction and design defects within a post-tensioned concrete building structure. April 26, 27, & 28, 2012.

Litigation

Hertz Investment Grp. LLC, et al. v. Zurich Am. Ins. Co., et al., Litigation support related to engineering assessment, scope of damage evaluation, code review, and repair of a multi-story office tower damaged by wind during CAT Laura and Delta.

Senior Living Facility Construction and Design Defect Investigation, TX. Site Evaluation and structural analysis to evaluate construction and design defects for multiple multi-story wood-framed residential structures.

Concrete Tunnel Investigation, TX. Site assessment including non-destructive testing and laser scanning of 5-mile-long large-diameter flood control tunnel. Engineering evaluation of alleged design and construction defects.

Concrete Balcony Investigation, CO. Engineering evaluation of deflection of concrete balconies on a multi-story residential concrete flat-plate building with proprietary connection.

Student Housing Construction Defect Investigation, Charlotte, NC, regarding litigation support and cause and origin investigation of multiple multi-story, wood-framed buildings to determine the root cause of alleged construction defects in the structural framing.

Residential Pool Investigations, Austin and San Antonio, TX, regarding litigation support and structural investigation to evaluate alleged construction defects at residential pool projects, including evaluation of structural movement of adjacent structures.

Site Grading Investigation, Baltimore, MD, regarding litigation support and civil engineering investigation to evaluate adequacy of design drawings and determine cut and fill volumes for a parking lot at a government facility.

EZ Storage, South Bowie, MD, regarding litigation support and structural investigation to determine the cause of concrete slab delamination at a 40,000-square-foot storage facility.

Home Depot Warehouse, Brooklyn, NY, regarding litigation support and structural investigation to determine the cause of cracking in a pile-supported two-way concrete structural floor slab at a warehouse facility. Analysis included 3D modeling, nondestructive testing by ground-penetrating radar, and evaluation of slab repair techniques.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Truss Bridge Collapse Investigation and Retrofit/Replacement, MS, regarding structural investigation and assessment to determine the cause and origin of the collapse of a steel truss bridge at a manufacturing facility. Work included retrofit of existing structures to remain, design of replacement truss, and presentation at mediation proceedings.

Pedestrian Bridge, Rockville, MD, regarding litigation support and structural investigation of impacts of steel detailing and sequencing during bridge construction. Work included presentation during mediation proceedings.

University of Connecticut, Biology/Physics Building Investigation, Storrs, CT, regarding litigation support and structural investigation into a claim by the structural steel subcontractor relating to the cause of construction delays. Work included participation in mediation sessions.

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Select Papers, Lectures and Publications

"Predicting the Future: How Fitness for Service Evaluation was Used to Determine the Fate of Damaged Industrial Equipment," 2024 Forensics Engineering Conference: Buildings and Infrastructure, The University of Texas at Austin Engineering Executive Education, Austin, TX, February 8, 2024 (presenter)

"Understanding Pre-engineered Metal Buildings Through Forensic Investigation," 2023 Forensics Engineering Conference: Buildings and Infrastructure, The University of Texas at Austin Engineering Executive Education, Austin, TX, February 9, 2023 (presenter)

"Adjusting Large Construction Defect Claims," Property & Liability Resource Bureau (PLRB) Claims Conference and Insurance Services Expo, San Antonio, TX, April 6, 2022 (presenter)

"The Forensic Mindset: It's Not Only About Engineering," The University of Texas Forensic Engineering Conference, Austin, TX, February 10, 2022. (presenter)

"Conveyor Bridge Collapse: Road to Resolution," The University of Texas Forensic Engineering Conference, Austin, TX, February 12, 2021. (presenter)

"Best Practices in Cause and Origin Investigation," The University of Texas Forensic Engineering Conference, Austin, TX, February 14, 2019 (presenter)

"Forensic Engineering: Luck or Skill," The University of Texas Forensic Engineering Conference, Austin, TX, February 21, 2018 (presenter)

"How Forensic Engineering is Still Influencing New Design," The University of Texas Forensic Conference, Austin, TX, February 23, 2017 (presenter)

"Investigating a Large Loss: The Dulles Jet Center Collapse," University of Texas STEER Conference, Austin, TX, September 22, 2016 (presenter)

"Five Things I've Learned Since Graduation," SEA-MW Future Engineer's Forum, Washington, DC, November 20, 2015 (presenter)

"Next Generation Steel," AISC NASCC Steel Conference, Nashville, TN, March 26, 2015 (presenter)

"Building Up the Fort, Fort Benning Martin Army Community Hospital," Modern Steel Construction, February 2014 (co-author)

"Sea and Space, Port Canaveral Visitors Center," Modern Steel Construction, October 2013 (co-author)

"The Healing Power of In-Model Review," AISC Shop Model Review and Approval Workshop, Washington, DC, March 14, 2013 (presenter)

"Engineering the NCB," Johns Hopkins Society of Engineering Alumni, Baltimore, MD, March 18, 2012 (presenter)

"The Two Towers, Johns Hopkins Hospital New Clinical Building," Modern Steel Construction, November 2008 (co-author)

"Five Things You Should Know About Structural Engineering," Cardozo High School Construction Academy, Washington, DC, November 28, 2007 (presenter)

"Waclaw Zalewski - Shaping Structures," University of Maryland, Gallery Talk, September 27, 2007 (panel member)

2007 Steer Conference at The University of Texas at Austin, March 23, 2007 (presenter)

CONTACT

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