Willis Tower

The **Willis Tower** (formerly the **Sears Tower**) is a 108-[story](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storey), 1,450-foot (442.1 m) [skyscraper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skyscraper) in [Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago). The tower has 108 stories as counted by standard methods, though the building's owners count the main roof as 109 and the mechanical penthouse roof as 110.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-4)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-History_and_Facts_-_Willis_Tower-3) At completion in 1974, it surpassed the [World Trade Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center_%281973%E2%80%932001%29) in [New York City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City) to become the [tallest building in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_buildings_and_structures_in_the_world), a title that it held for nearly 25 years. It was also the tallest building in the [Western Hemisphere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Hemisphere) for 41 years, until the [One World Trade Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_World_Trade_Center) surpassed it in 2013, and had the highest occupiable floor until surpassed by the [Central Park Tower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Park_Tower) in 2022.

Willis Tower is considered a seminal achievement for engineer [Fazlur Rahman Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fazlur_Rahman_Khan%22%20%5Co%20%22Fazlur%20Rahman%20Khan).[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-5) It is currently the [third-tallest building](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_buildings_in_the_United_States) in the [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) and the Western hemisphere – and the [23rd-tallest in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_buildings_in_the_world). Each year, more than one million people visit its observation deck, the highest in the United States, making it one of Chicago's most popular tourist destinations.

As of April 2018, the building's largest tenant is [United Airlines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Airlines), which moved its corporate headquarters from [77 West Wacker Drive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/77_West_Wacker_Drive) (then the United Building) in 2012, occupying around 20 floors.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-news-gazette1-6)[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-7)[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-:0-8) Other major tenants include the building's namesake [Willis Towers Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Towers_Watson) and law firms [Schiff Hardin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schiff_Hardin) and [Seyfarth Shaw](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyfarth_Shaw%22%20%5Co%20%22Seyfarth%20Shaw).[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-:0-8) [Morgan Stanley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morgan_Stanley) became the building's fourth-largest tenant in 2017.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-:0-8)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-9)

Known as the Sears Tower from its construction until the naming rights were included in a 2009 lease with the [Willis Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Group), it served as the headquarters of retail company [Sears](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sears) from 1974 to 1994. Local area residents still refer to the building by its old name.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-10)

History

**Planning and construction**



Breakdown of the [bundled tube structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tube_%28structure%29#Bundled_tube) of Willis Tower with simplified floor plans

In 1969, [Sears, Roebuck & Co.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sears) was the largest retailer in the world, with about 350,000 employees.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-11) Sears executives decided to consolidate the thousands of employees in offices distributed throughout the Chicago area into one building on the western edge of [Chicago's Loop](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Loop). Sears asked its outside counsel, Arnstein, Gluck, Weitzenfeld & Minow (now known as [Arnstein & Lehr, LLP](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnstein_%26_Lehr%2C_LLP%22%20%5Co%20%22Arnstein%20%26%20Lehr%2C%20LLP)) to suggest a location. The firm consulted with local and federal authorities and the applicable law, then offered Sears two options: the [Goose Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goose_Island_%28Chicago%29) area northwest of downtown, and a two-block area bounded by Franklin Street on the east, Jackson Boulevard on the south, Wacker Drive on the west and Adams Street on the north, with Quincy Street running through the middle from east to west.

After selection of the latter site, permits to vacate Quincy Street were obtained.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-12) Attorneys from the Arnstein firm, headed by Andrew Adsit, began buying the properties parcel by parcel.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-13) Sears purchased 15 old buildings from 100 owners and paid $2.7 million to the City of Chicago for the portion of Quincy Street the project absorbed.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-14)

Sears, which needed 3 million square feet (280,000 m2) of office space for its planned consolidation and predicted growth, commissioned architects [Skidmore, Owings & Merrill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skidmore%2C_Owings_%26_Merrill) (SOM). Their team of Colombian-Peruvian architect [Bruce Graham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Graham) and [Bangladeshi-American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladeshi_Americans) structural engineer [Fazlur Rahman Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fazlur_Rahman_Khan%22%20%5Co%20%22Fazlur%20Rahman%20Khan) designed the building as nine square "[tubes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tube_%28structure%29)" (each essentially a separate building), clustered in a 3×3 matrix forming a square base with 225-foot (69 m) sides.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-15) All nine tubes would rise up to the 50th floor of the building, where the northwest and southeast tubes terminate. The northeast and southwest tubes reach the 66th floor; the north, east, and south tubes end at the 90th. The remaining west and center tubes reach 108 floors.



The *Sears Tower* during its construction, in 1973

The Sears Tower was the first building to use this innovative design. It was both structurally efficient and economic: at 1,450 feet, it provided more space and rose higher than the [Empire State Building](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empire_State_Building) and cost much less per unit area.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-Lynn_S.Beadle_pays_tribute_to_Khan-16) The system would prove highly influential in skyscraper construction and has been used in most [supertall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supertall) buildings since, including the world's current tallest building, the [Burj Khalifa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burj_Khalifa%22%20%5Co%20%22Burj%20Khalifa).[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-17)[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-18) To honor Khan's contributions, the Structural Engineers Association of Illinois commissioned a sculpture of him[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-19) for the lobby of the Willis Tower.



A sculpture honoring [Fazlur Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fazlur_Khan%22%20%5Co%20%22Fazlur%20Khan) at the Willis Tower

Sears decided to focus their initial occupancy on housing their merchandise group, renting out the remaining space to other tenants until needed as Sears expected further growth and thus more employees in the future. The latter floor areas had to be designed to a smaller footprint with a high window-space to floor-space ratio to be attractive to prospective lessees. Smaller floorplates required a taller structure to yield sufficient square footage. Skidmore architects proposed a tower with large, 55,000-square-foot (5,100 m2) floors in the lower part of the building with gradually tapered floorplates in a series of [setbacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Setback_%28architecture%29), which would give the tower its distinctive look.

As Sears continued to offer optimistic projections for growth, the tower's proposed floor count increased rapidly into the low hundreds, surpassing the height of New York's unfinished World Trade Center to become the world's tallest building. The height was restricted by a limit imposed by the [Federal Aviation Administration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Aviation_Administration) (FAA) to protect air traffic. The financing of the tower was provided by Sears. It was topped with two antennas for television and radio broadcasting. Sears and the City of Chicago approved the design and the first steel was put in place in April 1971. The structure was completed in May 1973. The construction cost about US$150 million,[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-20) equivalent to $920 million in 2022 dollars.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-inflation-US-21) By comparison, [Taipei 101](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taipei_101), built in 2004, cost the equivalent of US$2.21 billion in 2018 dollars.[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-22)

Black bands appear on the tower around the 29th–32nd, 64th–65th, 88th–89th, and 104th–108th floors. These elements are louvres to ventilate the building's environmental support systems and obscure its [belted trusses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truss). Even though regulations did not require a fire sprinkler system, the building was equipped with one from the beginning. There are around 40,000 sprinkler heads in the building, installed at a cost of $4 million.[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-23)

In February 1982, two television antennas were added to the structure, increasing its total height to 1,707 feet (520.3 m). The western antenna was later extended, bringing the overall height to 1,729 feet (527 m)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1) on June 5, 2000, to improve reception of local [NBC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NBC) station [WMAQ-TV](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WMAQ-TV%22%20%5Co%20%22WMAQ-TV).

**Suits filed to halt construction**

As the construction of the building neared the 50th floor, lawsuits for an injunction were filed seeking to stop the building from exceeding 67 floors. The suits alleged that above that point television reception would deteriorate and cause property values to plummet. The first suit was filed by the state attorney in neighboring Lake County on March 17, 1972. A second suit was filed on March 28 in Cook County Circuit Court by the villages of [Skokie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skokie%2C_Illinois), [Northbrook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northbrook%2C_Illinois), and [Deerfield, Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deerfield%2C_Illinois).[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-24)

Sears filed motions to dismiss the Lake and Cook County lawsuits and on May 17, 1972, Judge LaVerne Dickson, Chief of the [Lake County Circuit Court](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_County_Circuit_Court), dismissed the suit, saying, "I find nothing that gives television viewers the right to reception without interference. They will have to find some other means of ensuring reception such as taller antennas."[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-25) The Lake County state's attorney filed a notice of appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court, which ultimately decided in favor of Sears.[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-26) In his decision on June 12, Judge Charles R. Barrett contended the plaintiffs did not have a right to undistorted television reception.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-27)

Meanwhile, the Illinois Citizens' Committee for Broadcasting requested the [Federal Communications Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Communications_Commission) (FCC) halt construction so the building would not interfere with television reception. On May 26, 1972, the Commission declined to take action on the grounds it did not have jurisdiction.

On June 30, 1972, the [Illinois Supreme Court](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illinois_Supreme_Court) affirmed the previous rulings by Lake and Cook County Circuit Courts, by a letter order with a written opinion to follow.[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-28) On September 8, 1972, the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit upheld the FCC decision.[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-29) The court's written opinion was filed on September 20, 1972. In affirming the lower court rulings, it held that "absent legislation to the contrary, defendant has a proprietary right to construct a building to its desired height and that completion of the project would not constitute a nuisance under the circumstances of this case." [[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-30)

**Post-opening**



Willis Tower at dusk, seen from the [Loop](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Loop)



Willis Tower from across the [Chicago River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_River)

Sears' optimistic growth projections were not realized. Competition beyond its traditional rivals such as [Montgomery Ward](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery_Ward) arose from emerging retail giants including [Kmart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kmart_%28United_States%29), [Kohl's](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kohl%27s), and [Walmart](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walmart). As a result of a surplus of office space that emerged in the 1980s, the tower did not draw as many tenants as projected and so stood half-vacant for a decade.

In 1984, Sears decided to improve the appeal of the lower floors of the tower to pedestrians. Their solution resulted in the addition of a new entryway dubbed by many as the "[Lunchbox Entrance](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Willis_Tower_Lunchbox_Entrance&action=edit&redlink=1)."

Sears looked into selling the Sears Tower in the late 1980s. In July 1990, with no potential buyer apparent, Sears took out a mortgage loan on the tower for $850 million from [MetLife](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MetLife) and [AEW Capital Management](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=AEW_Capital_Management&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "AEW Capital Management (page does not exist)), with Metlife as the holder of the mortgage note. This loan would [mature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maturity_%28finance%29) in 2005.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-:1-31)

In 1990, the law firm of [Keck, Mahin & Cate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keck%2C_Mahin_%26_Cate) decided to move into a development that would become [77 West Wacker Drive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/77_West_Wacker_Drive), rebuffing Sears' attempts to entice the firm to stay.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-32) Just two years later, Sears began moving its own offices out of the building[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-33) to a new campus in [Hoffman Estates, Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoffman_Estates%2C_Illinois), which was completed in 1995.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-:1-31)

As the maturation of the mortgage approached, Sears renegotiated the loan in 1994. The negotiations resulted in an agreement where Sears would no longer be liable for the $850 million loan, although it would only nominally own the building, while AEW and Metlife effectively had total control. As part of the 1994 agreement, AEW and Metlife would be able to take official ownership of the building in 2003.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-:1-31)

However, in 1997, Toronto-based [TrizecHahn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TrizecHahn%22%20%5Co%20%22TrizecHahn), at the time the lessee of the [CN Tower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CN_Tower), acquired AEW's holdings in the building for $110 million, assuming $4 million in liabilities and a $734 million mortgage.[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-34)[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-35)

Trizec projected that the Sears Tower would quickly reach a value of $1 billion. These projections were not met, with the tower facing the same vacancy and other problems it saw under Sears, although Trizec made somewhat successful efforts to attract new tenants. Following the [September 11 attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks), two of the largest tenants, Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch, immediately announced plans for vacating 300,000 ft2 of space. In 2003, Trizec sold its holdings of the tower to MetLife for $9 million.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-36)

In 2004, MetLife sold the building to a group of investors including New York-based [Joseph Chetrit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Chetrit), [Joseph Moinian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Moinian), [Lloyd Goldman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lloyd_Goldman), [Joseph Cayre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Cayre) and [Jeffrey Feil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_Feil), and [Skokie, Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skokie%2C_Illinois)-based American Landmark Properties.[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-37) The quoted price was $840 million, with $825 million held in a mortgage.[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-38)

In June 2006, [seven men](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty_City_Seven) were arrested by the [FBI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FBI) and charged with plotting to destroy the tower. Deputy FBI Director John Pistole described their plot as "more aspirational than operational".[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-39)[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-40) The case went to court in October 2007.[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-41) After three trials, five of the suspects were convicted and two acquitted.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-42) The alleged leader of the group, Narseal Batiste, was sentenced to 13½ years in prison.[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-43) In response to the perceived threat of an attack, the building's largest tenant at this time, [Ernst & Young](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_%26_Young), moved to North Wacker Drive in early 2009.[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-44)

Since 2007, the owners had considered plans for the construction of a hotel on the north side of Jackson Boulevard, between Wacker Drive and Franklin Street, close to the entrance of the observation deck, above the tower's underground parking garage. According to the tower's owners, the second building was considered in the original design. The plan was eventually cancelled as city zoning did not permit construction of a such a tall building in that location.[[45]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-45)

In February 2009, the owners announced they were considering a plan to paint the structure silver, an idea that was later abandoned. It was hoped that a new, silver, paint-job would "rebrand" the building and highlight its advances in energy efficiency for an estimated cost of $50 million.[[46]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-46)

Although Sears' [naming rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naming_rights) expired in 2003, the building continued to be called the Sears Tower for several years, despite multiple changes in ownership. In March 2009, London-based insurance broker [Willis Group Holdings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Group_Holdings) agreed to lease a portion of the building and obtained the naming rights.[[47]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-47) On July 16, 2009, the building was officially renamed Willis Tower.[[48]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-48) On August 13, 2012, [United Airlines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Airlines) announced it would move its corporate headquarters from [77 West Wacker Drive](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/77_West_Wacker_Drive) to Willis Tower.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-news-gazette1-6)

In 2015, the [Blackstone Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackstone_Group) purchased the tower for a reported $1.3 billion, the highest price ever paid for a U.S. property outside of New York City.[[49]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-49) In 2017, Blackstone announced a $500 million "facelift" for the property which would include the construction of a six-story commercial complex in the tower's plaza area.[[50]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-50)

**Flood**

In May 2020, heavy rains caused three of the basement levels to flood, knocking out power to the building. This also resulted in many TV and radio stations going off the air.[[51]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-51)

Skydeck

The Willis Tower observation deck, called the Skydeck, opened on June 22, 1974. Located on the 103rd floor at an elevation of 1,353 feet (412.4 m), it is the highest observation deck in the United States[[52]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-52) and one of Chicago's most famous tourist attractions.[[53]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-53) Tourists can experience how the building sways in wind and see far over the plains of Illinois and across [Lake Michigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Michigan) to [Indiana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiana), [Michigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michigan), and [Wisconsin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisconsin) in clear conditions. Elevators reach the top in about 60 seconds, allowing occupants to feel the change in pressure as they ascend. The Skydeck competes with the [John Hancock Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hancock_Center)'s observation floor a mile and a half away but reaching 323 feet (98.5 m) lower. Some 1.7 million tourists visit annually. A second observation deck on the 99th floor serves as a backup. The tourist entrance can be found on the south side of the building along Jackson Boulevard.

In January 2009, a major renovation of the Skydeck began, including the installation of retractable glass balconies which extend approximately 4 feet (1.2 m) from the facade of the 103rd floor, overlooking South Wacker Drive. The all-glass boxes, informally dubbed "The Ledge", allow visitors to see the street below. The boxes, which can accommodate 5 short tons (4.5 metric tons), opened to the public on July 2, 2009.[[54]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-54)[[55]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-55) On May 29, 2014, the [laminated glass](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laminated_glass) flooring of one of the boxes cracked while visitors were inside but there were no injuries.[[56]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-56) The flooring on that same box cracked again on June 12, 2019.[[57]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-57)



Three glass bottom skyboxes (top right) on the west façade of Willis Tower at the 103rd floor



View looking down from glass balcony



Glass balcony at the skydeck



Panorama of Chicago skyline as seen from Willis Tower Skydeck

Height



Height comparison of Willis Tower with other tall structures. From left to right: [Burj Khalifa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burj_Khalifa%22%20%5Co%20%22Burj%20Khalifa), Dubai; [CN Tower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CN_Tower), Toronto; Willis Tower, Chicago

The Willis Tower remains the third tallest building in the Americas (after [One World Trade Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_World_Trade_Center) and [Central Park Tower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Park_Tower)) and the [Western Hemisphere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Hemisphere). With a pinnacle height of 1,729 feet (527 m), it is the [third-tallest freestanding structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_freestanding_structures_in_the_world) in the Americas, 86 feet (26.2 m) shorter than Toronto's [CN Tower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CN_Tower). It is the [eighth-tallest freestanding structure in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest_freestanding_structures_in_the_world) by pinnacle height.

At 1,482.6 feet (451.9 m) tall, including decorative spires, the [Petronas Twin Towers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petronas_Twin_Towers) in [Kuala Lumpur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuala_Lumpur), [Malaysia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia), controversially claimed to be the tallest building in the world in 1998. In the ensuing controversy, four [categories of "tallest building"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World%27s_tallest_structures) were created.[[58]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-History-58) Of these, Petronas was the tallest in the category of height to the top of architectural elements, meaning spires but not antennas.

[Taipei 101](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taipei_101) in Taiwan claimed the record in three of the four categories in 2004 to become recognized as the tallest building in the world. Taipei 101 surpassed the Petronas Twin Towers in spire height and the Sears Tower in roof height and highest occupied floor. The height of the Sears tower is 508M vs Taipei 101 at 442M but the cosmetics on top of the building count to the height surpassing the Sears tower. People suggested Sears to add cosmetics on top to surpass Taipei 101 and regain the status of tallest building. This did not materialize.[[59]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-59)[[60]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-60) The Sears Tower did retain one record: its antenna exceeded Taipei 101's spire in height. In 2008, [Shanghai World Financial Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_World_Financial_Center) claimed the records of tallest building by roof and highest occupied floor.

On August 12, 2007, the [Burj Khalifa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burj_Khalifa%22%20%5Co%20%22Burj%20Khalifa) in [Dubai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dubai) was reported by its developers to have surpassed the tower in all height categories.[[61]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-61)

Upon completion, [One World Trade Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_World_Trade_Center) in New York City surpassed the Willis Tower through its structural and pinnacle heights, but not by roof, observation deck elevation, or highest occupied floor.[[62]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-62)

Until 2000, the tower did not hold the record for being the tallest building by pinnacle height. From 1969 to 1978, this record was held by [John Hancock Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Hancock_Center), whose antenna reached a height of 1,500 feet (457.2 m), 49 feet (14.9 m) taller than the Sears Tower's original height. One World Trade Center became taller by pinnacle height with the addition of a 359-foot (109.4-meter) antenna, bringing its total height to 1,727 feet (526.4 m). In 1982, two antennas were installed which brought its total height to 1,707 feet (520.3 m), making it taller than the John Hancock Center but not One World Trade Center. However, the extension of the tower's western antenna in June 2000 to 1,729 feet (527 m) allowed it to just barely claim the title of tallest building by pinnacle height.

At the bottom, the lowest level of Willis Tower is 43 feet below the elevation of Franklin St.[[63]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-63)

**Position in Chicago's skyline**



**Climbing**

On May 25, 1981, [Dan Goodwin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Goodwin), wearing a homemade [Spider-Man](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spider-Man) suit while using [suction cups](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suction_cup), camming devices, and sky hooks, and despite several attempts by the [Chicago Fire Department](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Fire_Department) to stop him, made the first successful outside ascent of the tower. Goodwin was arrested at the top after the seven-hour climb and was later charged with [trespassing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trespassing). Goodwin stated that the reason he made the climb was to call attention to shortcomings in [high-rise rescue](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=High-rise_rescue&action=edit&redlink=1) and [firefighting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firefighting) techniques. After a lengthy interrogation by Chicago's District Attorney and Fire Commissioner, Goodwin was officially released from jail.[[64]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-64)[[65]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-65)[[66]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-66)

In August 1999, French urban climber [Alain "Spiderman" Robert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alain_Robert), using only his bare hands and [bare feet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bare_feet), scaled the building's exterior glass and steel wall all the way to the top. A thick fog settled in near the end of his climb, making the last 20 [stories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storey) of the building's glass and steel exterior slippery.[[67]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-67)

Annually, since 2009, the Willis Tower has hosted SkyRise Chicago, the world's tallest indoor stair climb, as a charity event benefiting [Shirley Ryan AbilityLab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shirley_Ryan_AbilityLab), where participants can (legally) climb the Willis Tower's 103-story staircase.[[68]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-68)

Naming rights



West facade and entrance

Although Sears sold the tower in 1994 and had completely vacated it by 1995, the company retained the naming rights to the building through 2003. The new owners were rebuffed in renaming deals with [CDW](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CDW%22%20%5Co%20%22CDW) Corp in 2005 and the U.S. Olympic Committee in 2008. London-based insurance broker Willis Group Holdings Ltd[*[dubious](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AAccuracy_dispute%22%20%5Cl%20%22Disputed_statement%22%20%5Co%20%22Wikipedia%3AAccuracy%20dispute) –*[*discuss*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3AWillis_Tower#Dubious)] leased more than 140,000 square feet (13,000 m2) of space on three floors in 2009. A Willis spokesman said the naming rights were obtained as part of the negotiations at no cost to Willis[[69]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-69)[[70]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-70)[[71]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-71) and the building was renamed Willis Tower on July 16, 2009.[[72]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-podmolik-72)

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| --- |
| **Willis Tower** |
| Willis Tower From Lake.jpg |
| [https://maps.wikimedia.org/img/osm-intl,13,41.8789,-87.6358,250x200.png?lang=en&domain=en.wikipedia.org&title=Willis+Tower&groups=_006c90a151015a2dc0b736d193b03df2d15b1b18](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower%22%20%5Cl%20%22/map/0)[Wikimedia](https://foundation.wikimedia.org/wiki/Maps_Terms_of_Use) | © [OpenStreetMap](https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright) |
| **Former names** | Sears Tower (1973–2009) |
| **Record height** |
| Tallest in the world from 1973 to 1998[[I]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#endnote_talleststatus) |
| **Preceded by** | [World Trade Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Center_%281973%E2%80%932001%29) (1971) |
| **Surpassed by** | [Petronas Twin Towers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petronas_Twin_Towers) |
| **General information** |
| **Status** | Completed |
| **Type** | Office, observation, communication |
| **Architectural style** | [International](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Style_%28architecture%29) |
| **Location** | 233 S. Wacker Drive[Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago), Illinois 60606United States |
| [**Coordinates**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system) | https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/55/WMA_button2b.png/17px-WMA_button2b.png[41°52′44″N 87°38′09″W](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Willis_Tower&params=41.8789_N_87.6358_W_region:US-IL_type:landmark)[Coordinates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/55/WMA_button2b.png/17px-WMA_button2b.png[41°52′44″N 87°38′09″W](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Willis_Tower&params=41.8789_N_87.6358_W_region:US-IL_type:landmark) |
| **Current tenants** | [United Airlines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Airlines) |
| **Named for** | [Willis Towers Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Towers_Watson)[Sears](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sears) (1973–2009) |
| **Construction started** | 1970; 52 years ago |
| **Completed** | 1974; 48 years ago |
| **Owner** | [Blackstone Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackstone_Group)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-2) |
| **Height** |
| **Architectural** | 1,450 ft (442 m)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1) |
| **Tip** | 1,729 ft (527 m)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1) |
| **Top floor** | 1,354 ft (413 m)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1) |
| **Technical details** |
| **Floor count** | 108 (+3 basement floors)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-History_and_Facts_-_Willis_Tower-3) |
| **Floor area** | 4,477,800 sq ft (416,000 m2)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1) |
| **Lifts/elevators** | 104,[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1) with 16 double-decker elevators, made by [Westinghouse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westinghouse_Electric_Corporation), modernized by [Schindler Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schindler_Group) and recently remodernized by [Otis Elevator Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otis_Worldwide) |
| **Design and construction** |
| **Architect** | [Skidmore, Owings and Merrill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skidmore%2C_Owings_and_Merrill)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1)[Fazlur Rahman Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fazlur_Khan)[Bruce Graham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Graham) |
| **Main contractor** | Morse Diesel International |
| **References** |
| I. [**^**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#ref_talleststatus) [Willis Tower](https://www.emporis.com/buildings/117064) at *[Emporis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emporis%22%20%5Co%20%22Emporis)*[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willis_Tower#cite_note-skyscraperCenter-1) |