

Saskatchewan

Engineer who designed Sask. bridge that collapsed hours after opening facing disciplinary hearing

Sask. engineering association alleges Scott Gullacher broke rules when he designed Dyck Memorial Bridge

[Geoff Leo](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 13, 2022 5:00 AM CDT | Last Updated: May 13, 2022



A section of the newly built Dyck Memorial Bridge over the Swan River in the RM of Clayton collapsed on Sept. 14, 2018, hours after the bridge was opened to the public. (Submitted by Duane Hicks)



Regina engineer Scott Gullacher will face a disciplinary hearing next month over allegations that he broke the rules when he designed a bridge in rural Saskatchewan that collapsed just hours after it was opened to the public.

On Sept. 14, 2018, the Rural Municipality (RM) of Clayton announced on its Facebook page that "the Dyck Memorial Bridge is now complete and open."

Later that same day, the bridge collapsed. No one was injured.

In an interview just days after the collapse, the RM's Reeve Duane Hicks said some of the pilings on which the bridge was built had collapsed.

"So something tells me that something underneath the ground happened. I don't know what it was. They don't know what it was. Nobody knows what it is," he said.

At the time, Hicks chalked it up to an "act of God."

However, there may have been another explanation.

Hicks also revealed that the engineer who designed the bridge, Scott Gullacher, hadn't done a geotechnical investigation of the riverbed before installing the piles.

- [**Bridge that collapsed six hours after opening was built without geotech investigation of riverbed: Reeve**](#)

After years of investigation, the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan (APEGS) [posted a notice on its website on Wednesday](#) saying Gullacher will face a disciplinary hearing in early June.



Regina engineer Scott Gullacher is facing a disciplinary hearing next month related to his work designing a bridge that collapsed. (LinkedIn)

The association alleges Gullacher failed to practise "in a careful and diligent manner" when he designed the bridge and the screw piles that were supposed to hold it up. APEGS also claims Gullacher was offering services or advice in an area outside of his professional competence.

In addition, the association alleges he failed to be "careful and diligent" in his design of bridges in four other Saskatchewan RMs including Scott, Caledonia, Perdue and Mervin.

Gullacher also facing lawsuits

Those bridges are also the subject of a series of lawsuits.

The RM of Clayton has sued Gullacher and two companies he and his wife control: Can-Struct Systems Ltd., which is described as a "bridge construction" firm, and Inertia Solutions Ltd., which provides engineering services.

The RM has alleged that Gullacher and his companies breached their contract because the bridge was supposed to last for 75 years, but only stayed up for a few hours. The lawsuit points out that Gullacher failed "to design and/or construct a bridge that would not immediately collapse."

The lawsuit says that "no geotechnical report was prepared to determine the subsurface conditions under the bridge" and "Can-Struct's bridge design called for the use of screw piles as opposed to the industry-standard driven piles."

“The RM provided the instruction that no geotechnical investigation should be obtained as the RM was concerned about the additional cost and delay.”

- Scott Gullacher's and Inertia's statement of defence

In response to the lawsuit, Gullacher and his companies agreed that they hadn't done a geotechnical investigation, but insisted that was at the client's request.

"The RM provided the instruction that no geotechnical investigation should be obtained as the RM was concerned about the additional cost and delay," says Gullacher and Inertia's statement of defence.

"Inertia admits that a portion of the bridge collapsed," the statement says, "but denies that its design or specifications caused the collapse and puts the plaintiff to strict proof thereof."

Inertia says the RM may bear some blame because it decided to forgo the geotechnical work. It also says that after the bridge was built, the RM "installed gravel on the bridge to a depth of 13 to 16 inches with an average depth of 14 inches, which far exceeded the specified load."

In its lawsuit, the RM of Clayton is seeking damages for the cost of repairing and replacing the bridge, and for the loss of use of the bridge.

Inertia says not only has it done nothing wrong, but it also "denies that the [RM] suffered any damages or losses as alleged or at all.... In the alternative, Inertia says that the losses or damages claimed by the plaintiff are too remote. In the further alternative, Inertia says that the plaintiff has failed to take reasonable steps to mitigate its losses, if any."

The RMs of Scott, Caledonia, Purdue and Mervin have also sued Gullacher and his companies, which built bridges in those RMs. The lawsuits note that after the Dyck Memorial Bridge collapsed, inspections commissioned by the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities raised concerns about "deficiencies" in the design and construction of the other bridges.

As a result of the inspections, weight restrictions were imposed on the bridges.

In response, Gullacher and his companies say the bridges are designed and built to appropriate specifications, and that there are no problems with them. The statement of defence says "any weight restrictions imposed in relation to the bridge are unnecessary and were imposed without consultation" with Gullacher or his firms.

According to Gullacher's LinkedIn profile, he left his company Inertia Solutions in July 2019 and started Driftstone Consulting, a Regina-based engineering firm. He was a director and shareholder.

However, according to the corporate registry, he resigned as director at the end of last month and is no longer a shareholder.

CBC called Gullacher's phone number. The woman who answered said Gullacher would not want to speak with CBC and then hung up.

RM wanted to build a 'cheaper' bridge

The RM of Clayton hired Gullacher's construction firm, Can-Struct, in early July 2018 to design and build the bridge.

Earlier that year, the RM had turned down \$750,000 in provincial funding for the bridge because it was tied to the province's stringent technical specification for the bridge. RM officials believed those requirements were overkill, and would have made the bridge unnecessarily expensive.

- [Municipality where bridge collapsed opening day doesn't regret declining provincial cash for better bridge](#)

"This bridge is above our needs," said Kelly Rea, then RM administrator, in a public forum. "We do not need this bridge."

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Kelly Rea from the R.M. of Clayton raises concerns over bridge funding criteria

The province's more expensive bridge would have cost a total of \$1.075 million. As the province said it would cover \$750,000 of that, the RM would have been on the hook for \$325,000.

In other words, the province's "more expensive bridge" would have cost the RM precisely the same amount as the bridge it ended up approving — which fell down shortly after it was officially opened.

Late last year, the RM put out a tender for a new bridge.

The low-bidder and winner of the competition was Harbuilt Construction. Its bid was \$1,923,786.06, taxes included.

CBC has asked the RM for an update on the rebuild project, but it has not replied.

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