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Article 15

NEWS
It doesn't measure up Chicago losing tallest-building title
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Is too. Is not. Is too! Is NOT!

So goes the discussion over the world's tallest building.

Is it in Chicago, home of the 1,450-foot Sears Tower (antennas not included)? Or is it in Kuala Lumpur, **Malaysia**, where the Petronas Towers are nearing completion? Without spires, the Petronas complex is 209 feet shorter than the roof of the Sears Tower. With spires, it's 33 feet taller.

If Sears' antennas were allowed - which a panel of experts yesterday decided against - it would remain the ranking behemoth. But if Petronas' spires are included, why aren't Sears' antennas?

The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (yes, there really is such an organization) said yesterday that it does not consider antennas or TV and radio towers part of a building's "structural top."

The council, based at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, is devoted to high-rise design. Eight executive committee members unanimously voted yesterday to keep the existing standards - which give the "tallest" distinction to the two towers in **Malaysia**, said Lynn Beedle, the council's chairman.

How important is the Sears Tower to Chicago? How does the phrase "Chicago, Home of the World's Third-Largest Building" strike you?

Gerald Johnson, chairman of the Chicago Committee on High Rise Buildings, acknowledges the issue is a matter of ego and politics.

"Everybody wants to be the tallest, the biggest, the best," Johnson said.

But, he said, not having the tallest building won't make the 1.5 million annual Sears visitors forsake Chicago for Kuala Lumpur.

"I don't think anybody has not gone to New York in the last 25 years because the Empire State Building is the second- or third-tallest building," he said.

The ruling hasn't daunted Chicago - much.

"While there still is a dispute over what qualifies as the tallest building in the world, there is no disputing the fact that Chicago would still have the highest observation deck in the world," said Noelle Gaffney, spokeswoman for Mayor Richard Daley.

Well, actually you can dispute that. The floor of Sears Tower's skydeck is 1,353 feet. The observation deck is 1,465 feet at Toronto's CN Tower, which owns the title of "World's Largest Self-Supporting Structure."

Chicago long has been enamored of superlatives, said Robert Brueggemann, a modern-architecture expert at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Chicago claimed to have the first skyscraper, even though New York beat it by about a decade in the 19th century, he said.

Despite the board's ruling, the battle is unlikely to subside.

Construction begins next year on the Shanghai Financial Center, which is designed to stand 1,509 feet - 26 higher than Petronas and 59 feet taller than the Sears Tower.

Or is it 8 feet shorter than the bases of the Sears antennas? Or is it 194 feet shorter than the top of the 1,703-foot spikes at the top of the tower?

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