



LOCAL RULES

Golf Australia Recommendations (version 1 January 2016)

Committees may only use Local Rules that conform with either Appendix I, Part A of the Rules of Golf as approved by R&A Rules Limited, or that conform with this document. State Association approval must be obtained for any other Local Rule.

Many aspects of this document have been reproduced from The R&A's "Guidance on Running a Competition." The information is provided to assist Committees in conducting their own competitions.

General

- Local Rules are generally introduced to clarify the course marking or to provide relief from local abnormal conditions that are not covered by the Rules themselves.
- A penalty imposed by a Rule of Golf must not be waived by a Local Rule.
- It is the duty of Committees to interpret their own Local Rules – State Associations will assist Clubs in formulating Local Rules, but will not interpret Local Rules other than those covered by Appendix I or by this document.
- It is strongly recommended that Committees take due action to ensure notice of Local Rules is adequately provided to all players on the course. The means by which such communication occurs may vary depending on a club's resources. If a Committee would like assistance in determining an appropriate strategy it should contact its State Association.
- For a Committee wishing to adopt the recommended wording for a Local Rule provided in Appendix I it may simply refer to the Rule Book. For example, if the Committee is adopting the standard wording for a Local Rule for immovable obstructions close to the putting green, the Local Rule could read:

"Immovable Obstructions Close to the Putting Green
The specimen Local Rule is in effect – see pages 146-7, Rules of Golf".

Specimen Local Rules

When a Local Rule is made to meet a temporary need, it should be withdrawn as soon as conditions warrant.

1. Out of Bounds (Rule 27-1)

Committees must clearly clarify the boundaries of the course and highlight any holes on which the method of defining the boundary differs from the rest of the course. For example:

- 1.1 *Beyond any line of white stakes defining the boundary of the course, or beyond any wall or fence defining the boundary of the club's property. Objects defining out of bounds are not obstructions and are deemed to be fixed. (Notes: Angled supports of a boundary fence are obstructions. Where boundary fence posts have concrete bases, out of bounds is defined by the posts (NOT the concrete bases). Additionally the concrete bases are NOT obstructions.)*
- 1.2 *On or beyond any white line defining the boundary of the course. A ball is out of bounds when all of it lies on or over such a line.*
- 1.3 *At the 18th hole, on or beyond the concrete path surrounding the clubhouse.*

Note: The international standard is that stakes defining out of bounds are painted white. (This is the recommendation of The R&A and the USGA.)

2. Water Hazards (Rule 26)

Committees must clarify the status of all water hazards on the course – there are two different forms of water hazard, a normal water hazard (yellow markings) and a lateral water hazard (red markings).

Committees should also clarify in the Local Rules whether hazard stakes are immovable obstructions or movable obstructions. Ideally, stakes marking hazards should be treated by committees as movable obstructions, however it is appreciated that many committees will encounter challenges around this that are caused by players failing to replace stakes after removing them to play a stroke.

A ball that lands in a water hazard or lateral water hazard and is carried out of bounds by the flow of water is deemed to lie out of bounds. It is therefore recommended that where balls are likely to be carried out of bounds in a water hazard, a grill or screen be placed in the stream to prevent this occurring.

3. Ground Under Repair

GUR Local Rules may for example include:

3.1 *Any area enclosed by white lines.*

3.2 *Any area defined by [small stakes preferably painted light blue].* (Note: Stakes that are white, yellow, or red should not be used for this purpose.)

3.3 *All defined or ornamental garden beds.*

Note: The colour protocol guidance contained within 3.1 and 3.2 aligns with the international standard and the recommendations of The R&A and the USGA.

Unusual damage may be caused by animals or machines. Rule 25-1 gives relief from burrowing animals, but not for example from hoof marks made by sheep, or from ruts made by tractor wheels. Further GUR Local Rules may include:

3.4 *Clearly defined wheel ruts.*

3.5 *Any seam or edge of cut turf (but not the turf itself).* [But see note 2 below.]

3.6 *Cracks in the ground on closely-mown areas.* [But see note 2 below.]

Note 1: GUR – Play Prohibited (Areas of the Course Requiring Preservation)

If the Committee wishes to protect any area of the course from play, it should declare it to be ground under repair and prohibit play by Local Rule. Such express prohibition is required because Rule 25-1 gives the player the right to play their ball as it lies (on ground under repair) or take relief. If play is prohibited on an area of ground under repair, any notice(s) marking the area should read “GUR Play Prohibited” (see the Note in the Definition of “Ground Under Repair”). If such requirement will only be temporary, no specific reference should be included on the score card.

Note 2: GUR – Committee Authority to Deny Relief Where Only Interference is to Stance

If the Committee considers relief available under Rule 25-1 to be too generous in certain situations, it has the option to deny relief where the only interference is to the player’s stance (see Note to Rule 25-1a). Examples of when such an approach may be warranted are where a Local Rule has been introduced providing relief from cracks in the ground, or from seams of cut turf.

4. Obstructions and Constructions Deemed to be Integral Parts of the Course (Rule 24)

All constructions are either “obstructions” (relief is available under Rule 24) or “integral parts of the course” (where there is no relief except under penalty by declaring the ball unplayable). It is not permissible for a Local Rule to attach a penalty to relief obtainable under Rule 24, or for a Local Rule to modify the penalty for an unplayable ball.

Rule 24 provides relief from items that are obstructions as defined in the Rules of Golf. On some courses however there may be immovable obstructions that, because of their location, size, and shape, make the relief provided under Rule 24-2 inequitable. Club Committees have therefore, been given powers to vary the relief afforded in such cases. It is recommended, however, that Committees should use these powers sparingly, and when they have to use them, should conform as closely as possible with the type and degree of relief afforded by Rule 24-2. The following are cases in which a Committee should consider using its powers under Appendix I:

Immovable Obstructions (eg Sprinkler Heads) Close to Putting Greens – Line of Play Interference

Committees may provide relief from intervention by immovable obstructions on or within two club-lengths of the putting green when the ball lies within two club-lengths of the obstruction. The Committee may print on the card the wording used in Appendix I in the Rules of Golf (page 146-7), or may simply say:

4.1 *Immovable Obstructions (eg Sprinkler Heads) Close to Putting Greens – Line of Play Interference*
The Specimen Local Rule is in effect – see pages 146-7, Rules of Golf.

Overhead Wires (Decision 33-8/13)

When overhead wires or cables interfere with the proper playing of the game, an equitable solution is to require the stroke to be replayed, without penalty, if the ball strikes the obstruction. The player must not be permitted to choose between replaying the stroke or playing the ball as it lies. The following Local Rule is recommended:

4.2 *If a ball strikes the power line during play of the _____ hole, the stroke is cancelled and the player must play a ball without penalty as nearly as possible at the spot from which the original ball was last played (see Rule 20-5). If the ball is not immediately recoverable, another ball may be substituted.*

Protective Screens and Other Obstructions Close to the Line of Play (Decision 33-8/18)

Occasionally a high, close-meshed screen is erected to protect players on the tee of one hole from errant shots played at another hole. If this protective screen is relatively close to the line of play for the other hole, it would be permissible to make a Local Rule allowing a player whose ball is in such a position that the fence intervenes on their line of play to drop the ball, without penalty, not nearer the hole in a specified Dropping Zone.

Protection of Young Trees (or Staked Trees and Shrubs)

When it is desired to protect young trees, the following Local Rule is recommended:

- 4.3 *Staked/protected trees & staked/protected shrubs are immovable obstructions. The immovable obstruction includes the shrub/tree, AND the stakes, AND any artificial protective guard. If the immovable obstruction interferes with the player's stance or the area of their intended swing, the ball MAY [or MUST at the discretion of the Committee] be lifted, without penalty, and dropped in accordance with the procedure prescribed in Rule 24-2b (Immovable Obstruction). A wood-chipped (or other constructed) basin surrounding a tree or shrub that is either staked and/or protected by a tree guard is considered to be a part of the immovable obstruction. The ball may be cleaned when lifted under this Local Rule.*

Note: If the ball lies in a water hazard, the player MAY [or MUST at the discretion of the Committee] lift and drop the ball in accordance with Rule 24-2b(i) except that the nearest point of relief must be in the water hazard and the ball must be dropped in the water hazard, or the player may proceed under Rule 26.

Stones in Bunkers

By definition, stones in bunkers are loose impediments and therefore when a player's ball is in a hazard, a stone lying in or touching the hazard must not be touched or moved. However, stones in bunkers may represent danger to players (a player could be injured by a stone struck by a player's club in an attempt to play the ball). Stones in bunkers at some courses may also interfere with the proper playing of the game.

When permission to lift a stone in a bunker would be warranted, the following Local Rule is recommended:

- 4.4 *Stones in bunkers are movable obstructions (Rule 24-1 applies).*

Roads and Paths

By definition, the artificial surfaces and sides of roads and paths are immovable obstructions which means players are entitled to relief from them under Rule 24 unless the Committee declares them to be an integral part of the course. Although not required, the following Local Rule may be included for clarification purposes:

- 4.5a *The artificial surfaces and sides of roads and paths are obstructions.*

On courses where roads and paths are traditionally "in play", the Committee, if it wishes to deny relief without penalty, must make a Local Rule:

- 4.5b *All roads and paths are an integral part of the course.*

Some courses have artificially-constructed sides of tees, greens, faces of bunkers, etc, from which the committee may consider that relief without penalty should not be available. If so, such items must specifically be declared in the Local Rules to be "integral parts of the course". For example:

- 4.6 *The artificially-constructed side of the 13th tee is an integral part of the course. The ball must be played as it lies or declared unplayable (Rule 28).*

5. Temporary Conditions – Mud, Extreme Wetness, Poor Conditions, and Protection of the Course

Embedded Ball

Rule 25-2 provides relief without penalty for a ball embedded in its own pitch-mark in any closely-mown area through the green. However a Committee may consider it appropriate to extend embedded ball relief to anywhere through the green. If so, the following Local Rule is recommended:

- 5.1 *Through the green, a ball that is embedded in its own pitch mark in the ground, other than sand, may be lifted without penalty, cleaned and dropped as near as possible to where it lay but not nearer the hole. The ball when dropped must first strike a part of the course through the green. Exception: A player may not take relief under this Local Rule if interference by anything other than the condition covered by this Local Rule makes the stroke clearly impracticable.*

Alternatively, conditions may be such that permission to lift, clean and replace the ball is appropriate. In these circumstances, the following temporary Local Rule is recommended:

- 5.2 *(Specify area) a ball may be lifted, cleaned and replaced without penalty. Note: The position of the ball must be marked before it is lifted under this Local Rule.*

Preferred Lies

Conditions such as prolonged rains or extreme heat can make fairways unsatisfactory and sometimes prevent the use of heavy mowing equipment. If the Committee believes "preferred lies" would promote fair play or help to protect the course, it is recommended the Local Rule in Appendix I of the Rules of Golf (pages 143-4) be adopted.

In such a case, the Local Rule should be clearly communicated to players (either via the pro shop noticeboard, or in a hand-out to players, etc). The text of the Local Rule is as follows:

5.3 *A ball lying on any fairway [or specify a more restricted area, eg the 6th fairway] may be lifted, without penalty, and cleaned. Before lifting the ball, the player MUST MARK its position [but see note below]. Having lifted the ball, the player MUST PLACE it on a spot within [specify area, eg one card-length, or club-length, etc] of and not nearer the hole than where it originally lay, that is not on a putting green.*

A player must place their ball only once and it is in play when it has been placed. If the ball fails to come to rest on the spot on which it is placed, Rule 20-3d applies. If the ball when placed comes to rest on the spot on which it is placed and it subsequently moves, there is no penalty and the ball must be played as it lies, unless the provisions of another Rule apply.

If the player fails to mark the position of the ball before lifting it or moves the ball in any other manner, such as rolling it with a club, they incur a penalty of one stroke.

[Note: It would be acceptable for a Committee to introduce a Local Rule for preferred lies that does not require the player to mark their ball before lifting it.]

Tee-Up Through the Green

If ground conditions are unsatisfactory to the extent that “preferred lies” will not provide an adequate solution, a Committee may wish to introduce a “Tee-Up” Local Rule. Such ground conditions may be the result of environmental or maintenance factors. In these circumstances, the following Local Rule is recommended:

5.4 *(Specify area) a ball may [or MUST – see below note] be lifted and teed-up at the place it was lifted, without penalty. The ball may be cleaned when lifted under this Local Rule. Note: The position of the ball must be marked before it is lifted under this Local Rule.*

Note: When using such a Local Rule, a Committee may wish to REQUIRE players to tee their ball up (if, for example, preservation of the ground is a significant concern). In such a case it is recommended that a player have the option of playing their ball as it lies if it is within a specified distance (eg 15 metres) from the green.

Water-filled or water-damaged Bunkers

When a Committee considers a bunker to be damaged to the extent that it will require renovation to again become playable, the Committee may define the entire bunker to be ground under repair.

- In such a case, the bunker loses its status as a hazard and is automatically classified as ‘through the green’. (Therefore, unless a Committee specifically states otherwise, Rule 25-1b(i) applies, not Rule 25-1b(ii).)
- Heavy rain has the potential to cause bunkers to flood. In many instances bunkers will be playable once the water has cleared. In other instances bunkers will be substantially damaged and they will remain unplayable even once the water is gone. This can be due to a significant amount of sand and/or soil having moved, or bunker surfaces being left heavily covered with a sludgy residue which would significantly impact the proper playing of the game.
- In rare cases, there can be safety considerations attached to damaged bunkers.
- A committee may consider that all bunkers on a course are damaged to the extent that they will require renovation to again become playable.

When bunkers are completely flooded prior to a competition commencing but the Committee does NOT consider them to be in need of renovation, there is still an available Local Rule option. The Committee may introduce a Local Rule stating that certain specific bunkers are deemed to be ground under repair and classified as through the green.

- In such a case, these specific bunkers must be known to be flooded prior to the competition commencing and there must be no reasonable likelihood of the bunkers drying up during the competition.
- Under this Local Rule it will be permissible for a player to take relief outside these bunkers without penalty in accordance with Rule 25-1b(i).
- A Local Rule may not be introduced to provide relief generally from all bunkers if the Committee does NOT consider them to be in need of renovation. (EXCEPTION: Where there are 15 or less bunkers on the course, the Committee may introduce a Local Rule stating that ALL bunkers are deemed to be ground under repair and classified as through the green, regardless of whether or not they need renovating.)
- Specimen Local Rule when Renovation of Bunkers is NOT required: “The following bunkers are deemed to be GUR and ‘through the green’: [list bunkers]. The ball may be dropped without penalty at the nearest point of relief outside the bunker in accordance with the standard GUR relief procedure.”

6. Environmentally-Sensitive Areas

An area can only be classified to be an “environmentally-sensitive area” under the Rules of Golf by an authority such as a government agency. A club/competition committee does not have the authority under the Rules of Golf to classify an area to be an “environmentally-sensitive area”.

If an area is defined as environmentally-sensitive and entry into, and/or play from, the area is prohibited it is recommended the Local Rule in Appendix I in the Rules of Golf (pages 140-2) be adopted.

7. Dropping Zones / Dropping Stakes

In many cases, dropping zones have the potential to get heavily used resulting in inconsistent and sometimes poor turf quality. They also have to be routinely maintained with lines repainted to maintain visibility and definition to players. In situations where the need for a dropping zone ceases, it can take some time for the lines denoting the zone to fade (as the grass grows and is mown) thus causing confusion to players as to whether the relief option remains. As a result of the above, The R&A suggests that clubs may wish to consider using dropping stakes. A dropping stake should be approximately one metre high, made out of metal or wood, with the words "Dropping Stake" written/painted on at least two sides. While it is not mandatory for the stakes be a specific colour, it is suggested they be orange (preferably fluorescent or bright orange so they can be easily located by a player and so as to distinguish them from other stakes on the course).

The dropping stakes themselves can be defined as either movable or immovable obstructions. If the stakes are treated by the club as movable obstructions, it is recommended that a small paint mark be made to indicate the exact position to which the stake is to be returned in the event it is lifted.

8. Distance Measuring Devices

Rule 14-3 does not permit the use of any artificial device or unusual equipment for the purpose of gauging or measuring distance. However, a Local Rule may allow the use of a distance-measuring device during a round of golf, to measure distance and distance alone. For distance measuring devices to be permitted during a competition, the Committee must put a Local Rule in place allowing their use.

The local rule on distance-measuring devices provides that there is no penalty if a player uses a device with a non-conforming feature but does not actually use the non-conforming feature itself. Examples of non-conforming features include applications that measure or provide advice on: elevation changes or slope, wind speed, club selection, green reading, and effective distance between two points based on elevation changes or other conditions that affect shot distance.

The text of the specimen local rule is as follows:

"(Specify as appropriate, eg In this competition, or For all play at this course, etc.), a player may obtain distance information by use of a distance-measuring device. If, during a stipulated round, a player uses a distance-measuring device to gauge or measure other conditions that might affect his play (eg elevation changes, wind speed, etc), the player is in breach of Rule 14-3."

We hope this document assists in the management of your golf course and of play at your golf club. Please feel free to contact your State Association if you have any queries or if you would like any further information.

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