

SUSPENSION OF PLAY: NOTES

ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS: COURSE UNPLAYABLE

- Decisions about suspensions of play are often difficult for Committees.
- Rule 33-2d : “If the Committee or its authorised representative considers that for any reason the course is not in a playable condition or that there are circumstances that render the proper playing of the game impossible, it may, in match play or stroke play, order a temporary suspension of play or, in stroke play, declare a round null and void and cancel all scores for the round in question.” (All penalties are cancelled as well)
- In Match play, the match should be completed (ie not completely replayed) at another time.
- Golf is an outdoor sport, and golfers accept that conditions may not always be perfect.
- Unpleasant weather, muddy or windy conditions are not, in themselves, reasons to cancel a round.
- Committees need to be familiar with GA Handicapping guidelines regarding incomplete and cancelled rounds. These have changed with the introduction of the new GA Handicapping System. See p17, Section 10 (viii): *Scores Returned in a Competition that has been Declared Null and Void*. “A score returned by a player in a competition declared null and void should be used for handicapping purposes provided course or weather conditions have not notably compromised the proper playing of the game for that player.”
- The Club’s Handicap Authority should have a Policy in place.
- When a course is affected by sudden, heavy rainfall which causes flooding of greens or extensive areas of casual water, or strong winds which prevent balls coming to rest or remaining at rest on greens, a basic question for the Committee to consider is whether the course conditions allow for the proper playing of the game, under the Rules.
- In the proper playing of the game is not possible at the time, the Committee should consider suspending play until conditions improve.

CANCELLING A STROKE ROUND

There is no hard and fast rule about cancelling a stroke round.

Variables which affect the decision may be:

- How much of the field has completed the round
- How much daylight is left
- Are conditions likely to improve?
- Can the competition be completed on the following day or at some later time?
- How bad have conditions been before the suspension of play?

Decision 33-2d/1 gives some guidelines on when a Committee should cancel a round. “Generally a round should be cancelled only in a case where it would be grossly unfair not to cancel it. For example, if some players begin a round under extremely adverse weather conditions, conditions subsequently worsen and further play that day is impossible, it would be unfair to the players who started not to cancel the round.”

Decision 33-2d/2 makes it clear that, once a hole is surrounded by casual water, the course is unplayable.

- In stroke play, the Committee should suspend play;
- In match play, the Committee should relocate the hole.
- To some extent, situations resulting in suspension of play can be avoided by attention to expected weather conditions and careful hole placement, best done in consultation with the Course Superintendent. When adverse weather conditions threaten, it is important that pins are not positioned in gutters where the flow of water through the hole position will make the hole unplayable, even though the hole may be located in a high position on the green.

KEEPING PLAY GOING

- In some circumstances, when only a few greens are affected by casual water, the Committee may be able to keep play going, thus avoiding the long delay involved in bringing a field in for a suspension of play.
- Decision 33/1 refers to the Committee's ability to sanction the use of squeegees (and to permit players and caddies to assist) to clear casual water from a player's line of putt.
- A "Squeegee Policy", which gives guidance to players and officials, is very useful in such situations. (See the websites of GA *"Elite Competition Manual"* or R&A *"Guidance on Running a Competition"* for suggested wording).

FLOODED BUNKERS: DECISION 33-8/27

- A very useful Decision with which Committees should be familiar is 33-8/27, which states that a Committee may not make a Local Rule providing generally that flooded bunkers are ground under repair through the green, thus allowing a player to drop out of any bunker filled with casual water, without penalty, contrary to Rule 25-1b(ii).
- However, "in exceptional circumstances, where certain specific bunkers are completely flooded and there is no reasonable likelihood of the bunkers drying up during the round, the Committee may introduce a Local Rule providing relief without penalty from specific bunkers."
- Most usefully, the Decision provides suggested wording of a Local Rule which refers to the specific bunkers in question and their location, and, importantly, reminds players that "All other bunkers, regardless of whether or not they contain water, retain their status as hazards and the Rules apply accordingly."
- See GA Guidelines regarding handicapping when bunkers out of play.

SUSPENSION OF PLAY: DANGEROUS SITUATIONS

- The presence of dangerous conditions, particularly lightning, places great responsibility and stress on players and Committee.
- Players have the right, under Rule 6-8a, to discontinue play if they believe that there is danger from lightning.

- Decision 6-8b/5 states “This is one of the rare occasions in which the player is virtually the final judge. The safety of players is paramount, especially as there is a common natural fear of lightning. Committees should not risk exposing players to danger.”
- However, this Decision also states that, “if the Committee has used all reasonable means to ascertain the weather prospects and has concluded that no danger from lightning exists, it has the power to order a resumption of play and to disqualify any player who refuses to comply”.
- The Note to Rule 6-8a refers to the fact that “the Committee may provide, in the conditions of a competition (Rule 33-1), that in potentially dangerous situations play must be discontinued immediately following a suspension of play by the Committee.
- If a player fails to discontinue play immediately, he is disqualified, unless circumstances warrant waiving the penalty as provided in Rule 33-7”.
- Section 4 in Part C of Appendix 1 (p140) of the 2012-2015 Rules of Golf gives recommended wording for this Condition.

SIGNALS FOR SUSPENSION OF PLAY

It is recommended that Committees use the universally recognised signals for suspension of play, as listed on Page 141 of the 2012-15 Rules of Golf:

- Discontinue play immediately: One prolonged note of siren
- Discontinue play: Three consecutive notes of siren, repeated;
- Resume play: Two short notes of siren, repeated.
- Careful decision-making, prompt action and clear communication by the Committee can not only provide for player safety, but may also assist in alerting any spectators to the need to take shelter.

OTHER DANGERS:

Note that, although emphasis is given to a threat from lightning, the Note to Rule 6-8a and the wording of the recommended Condition refer to “dangerous situations” in general.

- At Castle Hill Golf Course, the safety of players was of concern during the recent 2014 NSW Medal because of flames and smoke from a bushfire which began during play on the edge of the golf course and quickly spread onto the course at the 6th fairway and near the green.
- An immediate suspension of play was called.
- Some players had chosen to remain on course during the suspension, and one group of these, unable to hear the siren signifying resumption of play, began play a few minutes early when they saw players back on the course. Decision 6-8b/6 was used in this situation and the decision was made to waive both the Disqualification and stroke penalties in light of the unusual circumstances.

RESUMPTION OF PLAY

- Committee members need to be familiar with Rule 6-8d to assist players with the procedure for resuming play after a discontinuance or suspension.
- Play must be resumed from where it was discontinued, even if resumption occurs on a subsequent day;
- If the player has lifted the ball, provided he was entitled to lift it, he must place the original or a substituted ball on the spot from which the original ball was lifted; otherwise, the original ball must be replaced (See Rule 6-8c);
- If the player has not lifted his ball, he may, provided he was entitled to lift it under Rule 6-8c, mark, lift and clean his ball or substitute a ball;
- If the player's ball or ball-marker has moved (including by wind or water) while play is discontinued, a ball or ball-marker must be placed on the spot from which the original ball or marker was moved;
- If this spot is impossible to determine, it must be estimated and the ball placed on the estimated spot.
- If the lie of the ball is altered (for better or worse) by natural causes, the player must accept those conditions and is not entitled to the lie he had prior to the discontinuance (Decision 6-8d/1). If the course is altered by an outside agency, eg bunkers raked by course staff, the player must re-create his original lie, for instance, a footprint in which the ball originally lay.
- In estimating the spot where the ball must be placed, the player is not entitled to a significantly better lie than he had with the original ball (Decision 6-8d/5).