

Reasons for change

The options to take relief back on a line behind any water hazard or within two club-lengths of where a ball entered a lateral water hazard had become important for pace of play. They mean the player can usually play from near the hazard, rather than having to go back some distance to play from where the previous stroke was made.

It has been recognised that requiring areas to contain water was an arbitrary reason for permitting such relief options.

For reasons such as safety and pace of play, many Clubs have expanded the use of lateral water hazards by marking areas that do not contain water and by marking water hazards as red where that is not specifically contemplated by the Rules.

The broader use of penalty areas will allow Committees to respond to the wide range of settings in which golf is played. They will be able to give relief from areas that present similar obstacles to existing water hazards and cause difficulties with finding and playing a ball. This will also meet practical needs about pace of play.

Giving Committees the discretion to mark all penalty areas as red will make it simpler for players to learn the relief options and will further help the pace of play. The current distinction between yellow and red water hazards is not always well understood.

Individual Committees will remain free to choose what to mark as a penalty area, so they could decide to mark only traditional water hazards. They can also choose when to mark a penalty area as yellow, for example, to preserve the challenge of playing a particular hole.

A strict prohibition on touching or moving loose impediments or touching the ground in a water hazard has never been practical. It created confusion and complications in applying

the Rules. For example, it was necessary to decide when a player was or was not 'testing', what constituted touching 'as a result of or to prevent falling', and similar questions.

The old prohibitions led to penalties that some viewed as overly harsh, such as:

- Where the breach was so inconsequential that the player could not have gained any advantage or where even a careful player could not have avoided the penalty, and
- In a televised competition, where the breach could not be detected by the player or others on the course and was discovered only through later video review.

Treating a penalty area the same as the general area for these purposes will simplify the Rules, reduce confusion and eliminate unnecessary penalties.

Removing these restrictions is consistent with the purpose of a penalty area. It's not intended to require the player to face a more difficult challenge in playing the ball, but to give the player appropriate relief options because it will often be difficult or impossible to play a ball from the penalty area, such as when the ball is under water.