

Reasons for change

A fundamental principle of golf is to play the ball as it lies; so the Rules should help the player to find his or her ball and play it from the spot where it was at rest.

Players often need to probe in grass, bushes, leaves and other conditions to look for a hidden ball, and such reasonable acts create a risk of moving the ball.

The current Rules allow an opponent in match play, and other players in stroke play, to help search for the player's ball without risk of penalty if they accidentally move the player's ball. Outside people, such as spectators, are allowed to help search as well.

It is inconsistent to encourage everyone but the player, or his or her caddie or partner, to look for the ball. This creates an odd incentive for the player to hold back and let others search.

Because the ball's location isn't known before it is found, eliminating a penalty in this situation will be a reasonable exception to the obligation to avoid moving a ball at rest.

Removing this penalty will not allow the player to benefit from excessive actions in searching for the ball. There will be a penalty if the player searched in an unreasonable way - beyond what was necessary for a "fair search" - and improved the conditions affecting the next stroke (see new Rules 7.1 and 8.1).

Changing the procedure for replacing a ball moved in search will help make sure the ball is played from its original spot or, if that spot is not known, on the estimated spot, including from a poor lie under grass or other growing things:

- Today, when a player returns such a ball to play by dropping it as near as possible to its estimated spot, the ball is typically dropped on top of the grass or other growing things, which can result in a much better lie than the player originally had.

- Under the new procedure, the player will need to replace that ball on its estimated spot on, under or against the grass or other growing things. So they will face the challenge of playing from that difficult spot where the ball had come to rest.

The Rules generally rely on the integrity of the player.

- In other relief situations, including when a ball may be lifted and played from a different place, players are allowed to proceed under the Rules without being required to involve another person in any part of the process.
- For example, a player may determine that a cart path interferes with the lie of his or her ball or the area of intended stance or swing, find the nearest point of relief, lift the ball and drop it in the specified area, determine that the ball has come to rest in the right place, and play the ball – all without having to announce his or her intentions to another person or to allow that other person to observe the process to make sure the player acts correctly.

Eliminating the announcement requirements for identification, to see if a ball has become unfit for play, or to see if it lies in a condition from which relief is allowed, will simplify the Rules. It brings consistency to the approach of trusting the player and eliminates an unnecessary procedural penalty for simply not informing an appropriate person.

These procedural requirements often have no practical effect as many players to whom such an announcement is made decline to observe the lifting and replacement process, being content to rely on the player's integrity.

This change should also speed up play because a player will no longer need to take the time to inform another player of the intent to lift and to wait to see if that other player wants to come over to observe.

The requirement for the player to have a good reason to lift under the Rule is a sufficient safeguard against inappropriate lifting or abuse of the Rule.