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Playing Golf Under the Rules In Unpleasant Course Conditions

The Oregon Golf Association (OGA) encourages all Committees in Oregon and Southwest Washington to reconsider how they adopt Local Rules to deal with unpleasant course conditions. What follows is a brief explanation of the options and recommendations to Committees that wish to provide golfers adequate relief while still adhering to the Rules of Golf as interpreted by the United States Golf Association (USGA). Note these options may be used in combination if required to meet the needs of the Committee.

Option #1

The OGA, Pacific Northwest Golf Association (PNGA) and the USGA recommend that all courses and competition committees adopt the Local Rule for *Embedded Ball Through the Green* throughout the entire year. This Local Rule provides a player free relief for a ball that is found *through the green* embedded in the ground in its own pitch mark. The specifics of this Local Rule can be found in Appendix I of the Rules of Golf ([App. 1, B, 4a](#)). To add this Local Rule, it is strongly recommended that you add the following wording to your scorecard and post the full wording of the appendix in a conspicuous location for reference.

“The Local Rule for Embedded Ball *through the green* is in effect as prescribed by Appendix I.”

[Click Here](#) to download a document for posting including the full wording of the Local Rule for Embedded Ball Through the Green.

Option #2

When the Committee determines that conditions will cause mud to adhere to the ball such that it interferes with the proper playing of the game, the OGA recommends the Committee use the Local Rule for *Cleaning Ball*. This Local Rule allows a player, without penalty, to lift and clean the ball anywhere on the course except in *hazards* (meaning both *bunkers* and *water hazards*).

Most importantly, it is simple to explain as the procedure is exactly the same as what golfers are already permitted to do on the *putting green*. This Local Rule simply extends the freedom to clean the ball to a larger area of the *course* as determined by the *Committee*. The specifics of this Local Rule can be found in Appendix I of the Rules of Golf ([App. 1, B, 4b](#)). To add this Local Rule, it is recommended that you post the full wording of the appendix in a conspicuous location for reference as shown on the following page.

“*Through the green* (or specify a more restrictive 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 - see Rule 20-1.

PENALTY FOR BREACH OF LOCAL RULE: Match play - Loss of hole; Stroke play - Two strokes.”

Note that this Rule does not provide the golfer a preferred lie. The ball, when lifted under this Local Rule, must be replaced in the same lie, not placed in a preferred lie. In addition, this Local Rule should only be posted when the conditions merit and removed as soon as it is no longer needed.

[Click Here](#) to download a document for posting including the full wording of the Local Rule for Cleaning Ball. (continued on next page)

“Serving Golfers in Oregon and Southwest Washington”

Option #3

Preferred Lies (also known as “winter rules” or “lift clean and place”) is a vastly misunderstood Local Rule. However, it is effective and recommended by the OGA when certain local abnormal conditions in the fairway or fringe prevent the proper playing of the game. Note this Local Rule can only be used in closely mown areas through the green. Accordingly, this Rule cannot be used in the rough and is restricted to use in the fairway and fringe.

An example of a local abnormal condition the OGA recommends dealing with by enacting Preferred Lies is the bi-annual worm cast smears seen in fairways during the shoulder seasons. This abnormal condition, often predicated by prolonged rain, creates thousands of mud smears in the fairway and can create unfair and unpleasant play throughout the course. The Preferred Lies Local Rule is the ideal way to deal with this condition. It provides that golfers are rewarded for their accuracy and are given the option to clean the ball and place it in a location nearby that provides a normal fairway lie. Note that you must post the restrictions (**in red text below**) if you choose to enact this Local Rule. Simply posting a sign that reads, “Winter Rules” or “Preferred Lies” does not suffice. Without complete guidelines you create the opportunity for inequitable play by leaving golfers to their own devices to interpret the meaning of the Rule as they see fit. The specifics of this Local Rule can be found in Appendix I of the Rules of Golf ([Appx 1, B, 4c](#)). To add this Local Rule, it is recommended that you post the full wording of the appendix in a conspicuous location for reference as shown below:

“A ball lying on a closely mown area⁽¹⁾ *through the green* [**or specify a more restricted area, e.g., at the 6th hole**] may be lifted without penalty and cleaned. Before lifting the ball, the player must mark its position. Having lifted the ball, he must place it on a spot within one club-length [**or specify area, e.g., six inches, a scorecard length, etc.**] of and not nearer the hole than where it originally lay, that is not in a *hazard* and not on a *putting green*.

A player may place his ball only once, and it is *in play* when it has been placed (Rule 20-4). If the ball fails to come to rest on the spot on which it was 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 any other *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, he incurs a penalty of one stroke.

⁽¹⁾ “Closely mown area” means any area of the *course*, including paths through the rough, cut to fairway height or less.

*PENALTY FOR BREACH OF LOCAL RULE: Match play - Loss of hole; Stroke play - Two strokes.

*If a player incurs the general penalty for a breach of this Local Rule, no additional penalty under the Local Rule is applied.”

This Local Rule should only be posted when the conditions merit and removed as soon as it is no longer needed.

[Click Here](#) to download a document for posting including the full wording of the Local Rule for Preferred Lies.

Should you have any questions regarding the position above, please contact the Oregon Golf Association.

Thank you for your interest in the Rules of Golf!

Sincerely,



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