



SCOTTISH GOLF
UNION



SCOTTISH LADIES'
GOLFING ASSOCIATION

GUIDANCE FOR COMPETITION ORGANISING COMMITTEES ON DEALING WITH INCLEMENT WEATHER AND CONSEQUENT ADVERSE COURSE CONDITIONS

During the winter months Scottish golf clubs are very accustomed to experiencing periods of extreme and inclement weather e.g. heavy rainfall, frost, snow, gales etc. 2008 showed only too clearly that such problems are no longer confined to the winter months and that the impact of a changing climate is also likely to present club Committees with some major challenges during the summer months as they try to keep their golf courses in competition condition for their membership. Many of the queries to the offices of the SGU and SLGA in 2008 related to inclement weather problems often seeking solutions that may or may not be permissible under the Rules of Golf or the CONGU[®] UHS. This document therefore summarises some of the options available to golf clubs and Committees to cope with the impact of inclement weather conditions and consequent course conditions

Dealing with adverse weather/course conditions that arise during a competition

Extreme bad weather conditions that evolve once a competition has started are a challenge for any Committee and one that affects golf worldwide. Committees should be conversant with the guidelines given by the R&A in section 8 – Inclement Weather and Suspensions of Play - of Chapter 6 – Competition Administration – in its publication “Guidance on Running a Competition”. In addition, Decisions of the Rules of Golf 33-1/2, 33-2d/1 and 33-2d/2 provide some assistance. Much of this guidance, however, relates principally to competitions played over more than one round i.e. 36 or 72 hole competitions when there is usually some flexibility to suspend play and resume the following day or, if absolutely necessary, reduce the number of rounds in order to complete the competition on schedule.

At club level problems more frequently relate to 18-hole club stroke play events and one-day open competitions; there is rarely an opportunity to extend these events over to the following day although sometimes completely rescheduling the competition is a possibility. The Committee has to make a judgement call based on the particular situation but as far as the Rules of Golf are concerned some important points must be borne in mind:

- The Rules of Golf are written with the underlying assumption that all players in the field will be able to complete their stipulated round (excepting for Disqualification or No Returns etc); if that is not possible the round will be cancelled.
- There is no authority within the Rules of Golf for a Committee to determine that a competition result will be declared if a certain percentage of the field e.g. where 50% / 75% have completed their rounds.
- The Committee has no power to reduce the number of holes of a stipulated round once play of that round has commenced (Decision 33-1/2).

Ultimately the Committee must determine the procedures for any given situation and must try to be as fair as possible to all competitors in any competition field. No one solution fits all. For many club events there will not be any Committee representative in the clubhouse and the players will be left to play on or discontinue as they see fit with the Committee left to sort out the situation retrospectively. A club hosting an Open event is in a different position; Committee representatives will be on site and must be prepared to take a proactive role in managing the situation and communicating any decision to the players. Points to consider:

- For localised problems with casual water – e.g. one or two greens – squeegees may enable a competition to be completed. See below for use of squeegees.
- If the disruption is predicted to be severe but short-lived, a prompt suspension of play may enable players to shelter from the worst of the bad weather; their play will not have been too adversely affected by the deteriorating course conditions and most will be willing to resume once the course is playable again.
- Once the play of a round has started, if it is clear that not all the field can complete their rounds on the day and the event cannot be continued later, the Committee has no option but to cancel the round. If the event is a qualifying competition for handicap purposes the round becomes Reduction Only with the CSS = SSS and handicap adjustments made only for competitors with a Nett Differential of less than zero (CONGU® UHS Clause 18.6).
- Whilst the variable CSS will take care of the effect of some adverse weather it cannot be expected to compensate for extremes of water on greens, fairways or bunkers or for very high winds on fast, sloping or exposed greens. It is not essential for a greenkeeper to be present to formally close the course – the organising Committee must often make a judgement call in this respect.

Safety

The Committee must be active in ensuring the safety of players (and any spectators). The most frequently occurring threat to an ongoing competition is lightning. Players are permitted to suspend play under Rule 6-8a if they believe there is a threat of lightning. Committees must not, however, take this to mean that they can leave this up to the players. One player may run for cover at the first sound of distant thunder while others will continue monitoring the situation to judge whether or not the threat is likely to materialise. A lightning detector (if available) or phone call to the local weather centre may help Committees assess the situation. Fog, a particular problem on coastal courses in summer, is another condition where safety considerations should be uppermost. Committees should have a procedure to enable them to notify players promptly of a decision to suspend play and evacuate the course, if necessary.

Casual water

Committees should be prepared to make a timeous decision when significant casual water arises during a competition and not leave it for most of the players to walk in and retire from the event. A Committee may take the view that such No Returns save it from formally cancelling the event but this may be unsatisfactory for any who are left on the course waiting for a Committee decision and also, if the course (or part of it) is genuinely unplayable, unfair to those who retired. Whilst some competitors will give up at the first signs of rain, it should be noted that Competitors have no authority to determine that the course is unplayable for competition purposes. Committee members should inspect the more vulnerable parts of the course and report back. It is not necessary to wait until holes are overflowing with or completely surrounded by water, fairways have large lakes forming and bunkers are flooding to suspend play and take stock of the situation – a judgement can be made to determine whether the course (or part of it) has become unplayable for competition play or has simply just become unpleasant to play.

Managing suspension and resumption of play

Unlike professional tour or elite amateur players, the average club player is not accustomed to organised suspensions of play. Suspensions of Play during televised tour events are controlled by experienced Rules Officials and most clubs simply do not have the personnel or sufficient horns, buggies and radios to organise a suspension or evacuation with such precision. Allowances should be made for misunderstandings and players' unfamiliarity with procedures.

Committees should be conversant with the provisions within Rule 6-8. In particular they should note that there is no absolute requirement for a ball to be marked and lifted it can be left *in situ*. In the case of a potentially dangerous situation, it is more important to get the players off the course and it is permissible for a ball to be left in play. Players should be advised by the Committee of the procedure for the resumption of play. In particular they should be reminded that if the exact position of the original ball cannot be determined (e.g. because it or the ball marker has moved during the suspension) the position must be estimated and a ball **placed** on the estimated spot. Committees should be aware that some players may expect to have to drop a ball in such circumstances and where appropriate this should be made clear for players.

Use of squeegees

Where casual water on the greens may be a problem squeegees can be employed both during a suspension of play and while play is in progress. If squeegeeing is envisaged during play club Committees should have a policy that is clearly set out, preferably in writing, for competitors at the start of the competition. It is usual for competitors to be allowed either to have the line of putt squeegee'd or relief to be available under Rule 25-1b (iii). See the R&A's publication *Guidance on Running a Competition* for further considerations and sample wording to assist Committees establish policies. Committees should be aware that squeegeeing the greens, particularly if this is left to the competitors themselves, will delay the pace of play. Players can assist in the process (without incurring a penalty under Rule 13-2) but only with the permission of the Committee (Decision 33/1). At club level it is rare to have sufficient support/equipment to allow squeegeeing on more than one or two greens. If casual water is a problem on most of the greens it is questionable whether the course is fit for a qualifying competition.

Relocating holes or teeing grounds

In match play a hole or teeing ground may be relocated if the original becomes unplayable e.g. due to casual water or because of high winds. In stroke play, however, the Committee does not have the authority to relocate a hole unless it is severely damaged – Rule 33-2b and its Exception and see Decisions 33-2b/1, 33-2b/2 and 33-2d/2. For relocating teeing grounds see Decision 25-1b/4.

Flooded bunkers

If a bunker becomes flooded once play has commenced players may only take relief under Rule 25-1b(ii). Decision 33-8/27 empowers a Committee to declare **specific** bunkers as "GUR Through the Green" **prior** to the start of a stipulated round. In such situations relief without penalty outside the bunker is available under 25-1b(i).

The purpose of the Decision is to enable a Committee to cope with a few known problem areas that otherwise could prove unfair to some of the competitors. When most of the bunkers are seriously affected by casual water the Committee should consider whether it is reasonable to hold a competition under such conditions – quite often there will be problems on other areas of the course as well. If the Local Rule is applied as intended in the Decision to a very few, specific bunkers then the competition can be played as a Qualifying Competition for handicap purposes. If most bunkers are affected the SGU/SLGA should be contacted to see whether or not competitions played can be considered as qualifying for handicap purposes.

Ongoing problems and Winter Conditions

Most ongoing problems relating to wetness of/damage to the course can be addressed by marking affected areas as GUR and/or the introduction of Local Rules. Relief under Rule 25-1b for Abnormal Ground Conditions is optional and wherever practicable, particularly during the playing season, players should be given the option to play the ball as it lies if they so wish. Committees do have the power to prohibit players from playing from GUR (Appendix 1 Part B 2a of the Rules of Golf for specimen Local Rule) but this should be reserved for areas requiring specific protection e.g. areas under renovation or areas that are severely damaged, particularly if there may be safety considerations were players to play from these areas. It is recommended that white markings be reserved for GUR where relief is optional and that where play is to be prohibited from GUR such areas are marked in an alternative manner e.g. blue lines/ stakes. Guidance as to what conditions may be considered as casual water is given in Decisions 25/1 to 25/6 and for GUR in Decisions 25/7 to 25/23.

Local Rules that can be invoked

Appendix 1 Part A of the Rules of Golf gives guidance to Committees on publishing Local Rules and Appendix 1 Part B sets out Specimen Local Rules to assist in drafting. Whenever a Committee has a need for a Local Rule to cover a situation set out in these Appendices it should make use of the relevant specimen Local Rule the wording of which should conform entirely to that given in Appendix 1 Part B. Wording that does not conform exactly to the R&A's specimen wording causes confusion amongst players, particularly visiting players, who are conversant with the R&A's drafting. Note that Committees do not have the authority to modify a Rule of Golf without prior consent from the R&A. The Specimen Local Rules applicable to wet conditions and course protection are set out in Section 4 of Appendix 1 Part B.

Preferred Lies

The wording for the introduction of Preferred Lies is given in the Rules of Golf Appendix 1 Part B 4c. Competition Playing Conditions will apply and Qualifying Competitions can be held during a preferred lie period if the conditions set out in Clause 15 of the CONGU[®] UHS have been met.

- The wording of the Local Rule must be in accordance with the Specimen Local Rule and the specified area must be within 6 inches (150mm).
- For the use of preferred lies during the period from 1 May to 30 September inclusive to enable Competition Play Conditions to apply, permission must be first be obtained as appropriate, from:
 - SGU Area Secretary, whom failing the SGU offices
 - SLGA National Course Rating Assessor, whom failing the SLGA offices

This permission must be obtained prior to any competition for handicapping purposes commencing.

- During the "Preferred Lie period" from 1 October to 30 April inclusive permission for preferred lies for Qualifying Competitions is not necessary.
- Preferred lies may be applied on all closely mown areas or may be restricted to parts of the course where specific difficulties occur.

Extension of relief for embedded ball relief to “through the green”

Relief for an embedded ball under Rule 25-2 is limited to closely mown areas. A Committee is empowered to extend this to through the green where conditions so require under a Local Rule. (Appendix 1 Part B 4a of the Rules of Golf). This can be applied over all 18 holes or may be restricted to specific parts of the course. It is rarely necessary to invoke this option on links courses; indeed to do so usually only creates confusion amongst participating players. This is because it is extremely rare for a ball to be genuinely embedded in the rough on a links course – it is common for it to be embedded in tufts of grass, where the surface of the ground is not physically broken. If the Local Rule is in place players may inadvertently take relief to which they are not entitled. On parkland courses in wet weather it is often necessary to extend embedded ball relief both to help preserve the golf course and for the proper playing of the game. Extending the relief to through the green is acceptable for handicap purposes (CONGU® UHS Decision 1(c)).

Introduction of “Lift, Clean and Replace”

Wording for this Local Rule is given in Rules of Golf Appendix 1 Part B 4b. The purpose of this Local Rule is to give the player the opportunity to clean the ball under wet or muddy conditions but unlike the preferred lie Local Rule the player must replace the ball in the **actual position** from which it was lifted. Its use should be restricted to specific problem areas of the course or for unusual situations following periods of unusual wetness. This Local Rule option is used sometimes by the Professional Tours and very occasionally by Unions, Areas and Counties for specific stipulated rounds when every player can be advised of its implementation at the start of the competition. At club level this Local Rule is likely to be poorly understood (particularly given its similarity to the preferred lie Local Rule) and incorrectly implemented and should therefore not be used routinely. It is recommended that clubs implement the preferred lie Local Rule when conditions so require.

Declaring bunkers out of play for renovation

It is often necessary, particularly in winter, for greenkeeping staff to carry out renovations to bunkers and their surrounds. It is also undesirable for players to play from these areas until the renovations have been completed. Merely putting a GUR sign up in the bunker or surrounding the area with ropes does not change the status of the bunker as a hazard or permit players to take free relief outside the affected area. Nor does it prevent the player from playing from the bunker or its surrounds unless there is a Local Rule making the taking of relief mandatory from such areas. Committees should be aware of Decision 25/13 of the Rules of Golf; it sets the position out clearly. In order to allow players to take free relief outside the bunker the Committee must first declare such bunkers to be GUR “through the green”, thus removing their status as a hazard. In addition it is advisable to make the taking of relief from such areas mandatory until the renovations are completed and the repairs settled in. Committees are failing in their duties to their members if they leave the players unclear as to the status of such bunkers and to the options available and the procedures that should be adopted. Qualifying Competitions may be played when such a Local Rule is in force (CONGU® UHS Decision 1(e)).

Use of Fairway Mats

Decision 1(a) of the CONGU® UHS sets out the conditions under which the use of fairway mats is permitted in Qualifying Competitions. It is important that the specimen Local Rule therein is adopted in its entirety. In particular note that for Qualifying Competitions the use of mats is restricted to closely mown areas and that the ball must not be teed-up on the mat (the mat itself may, however, be pegged into the ground). The use of fairway mats for Qualifying Competition purposes is restricted to the period 1 October to 30 April inclusive.

Requirement to place ball from the fairway into the semi-rough

A Local Rule that requires or permits players to lift a ball from a closely mown area and drop or place in the semi rough to protect the fairway is not within the Rules of Golf and any competition played under conditions cannot be qualifying for handicap purposes (CONGU® UHS Decision 1(d)).

Artificially Surfaced Teeing Grounds

Artificially surfaced tees, whilst not usually fully satisfying the two club length distance under the Definition in the Rules of Golf, if placed at locations that relate to the relevant Measured Course may be used in Qualifying Competitions (CONGU[®] UHS Decision 1(b)).

It is the hope of the Joint SGU/SLGA Handicap and Course Rating Committee that clubs will make every effort to keep courses in condition such that Competition Playing Conditions prevail and Qualifying Competitions can be held for as much of the year as is practicable in our unpredictable climate. Committees requiring any additional advice, or clarification of any of the above matters are invited to contact the SGU (01334-466477) or SLGA (01738-442357) offices for further guidance.