

## Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

### 8. Concept of “Penalty Areas” to Supersede “Water Hazards”

**Current Rule:** Rule 26-1 allows relief with penalty when a ball is in a “water hazard” (marked yellow) or a “lateral water hazard” (marked red).

- These hazards are limited to areas with water or where water may flow; no other areas may be marked as water hazards, even if they might present similar obstacles to play.
- Water hazards are intended as the norm; lateral water hazards are to be used only when it is impracticable to drop a ball behind a water hazard under Rule 26-1b.

**2019 Rule:** Under the new Rules, “Water hazards” will be superseded by the expanded concept of “penalty areas”, and Rule 17 will provide the same basic options for relief that exist under the current Rules:

- A penalty area will include both (1) all areas currently defined in the Rules as a water hazard or lateral water hazard and (2) any other areas the Committee chooses to define as penalty areas (with recommended guidelines to be provided in the guidebook).
- Penalty areas may therefore include areas such as deserts, jungles, lava rock fields, etc.
- The two types of penalty areas will be known by the colour of their marking: red penalty areas (today called lateral water hazards) and yellow penalty areas (today called water hazards); and Committees will be given the discretion to mark all penalty areas as red so that lateral relief will always be allowed.
- The term “hazard” will no longer be used in the Rules.

#### **Reasons for Change:**

- The options to take relief back on a line behind any water hazard (Rule 26-1b) or within two club-lengths of where a ball entered a lateral water hazard have become important for pace of play, as 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 recognized that requiring areas to contain water seems to be a somewhat arbitrary reason for permitting such relief options.
- For reasons such as safety and pace of play, many Committees have sought to expand 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 by giving relief from areas that present similar obstacles to existing water hazards such as difficulties with finding and playing a ball and similar 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 (as the distinction between yellow and red water hazards is not always well understood) and will further help pace of play.
- Individual Committees will remain free to choose what to mark as a penalty area (and so for example could decide only to mark traditional water hazards) and when to mark a penalty area as yellow (such as to preserve the challenge of playing a particular hole).

## Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

### 9. Elimination of Opposite Side Relief for Red Penalty Areas

**Current Rule:** Rule 26-1c provides two extra options for taking relief from a lateral (red) water hazard; the player may drop a ball within two club-lengths of (and not nearer the hole than):

- The point where the original ball last crossed the margin of the lateral water hazard, or
- A point on the opposite margin of the hazard equidistant from the hole (Rule 26-1c(ii)).

**2019 Rule:** Rule 17.1d will remove the option to take relief on the opposite side of a red penalty area (the new term that will include what is today called a lateral water hazard):

- This means that, when a ball is in a red penalty area, the player will have three options for relief (all for a one-stroke penalty) rather than four options as today.
- But a Committee could still adopt a Local Rule allowing opposite side relief on those holes where it believes the other relief options are not viable.

#### **Reasons for Change:**

- Opposite side relief is a complicated option that many players are not familiar with and that is seldom used.
- The primary purpose behind this relief was to give an extra relief option for the unusual cases where neither back-on-the-line relief (Rule 26-1b) nor lateral relief on the side where the ball entered the water hazard (Rule 26-1c(i)) seem viable and the player's only realistic option is to take relief under penalty of stroke and distance (Rule 26-1a).
- In practice, opposite side relief is often taken when a player actually has adequate relief under one or both of the other relief options and thus serves only to give an unnecessary extra option that at times can seem too advantageous.
  - For example, where a stream runs next to a fairway and a line of trees or thicker rough is on the other side, a ball that is poorly played into the trees or rough and then bounces back into the water can result in the player being allowed to take relief on the fairway.
  - For larger bodies of water such as a pond or small lake, opposite side relief can allow the player to play from a considerable distance away from where the ball entered the water or came to rest and/or to play from the fairway of another hole.
  - Removing this option may, in rare situations, result in a player's best (or only) option being stroke-and-distance relief; there is nothing wrong with a player sometimes having to proceed under stroke and distance.
- Assessing the relief option for opposite side relief can take considerable time and so eliminating this option should benefit pace of play.
- This change will also help avoid any concern that, with the expanded use of red penalty areas, a player might be able to use the opposite side option to drop on the green side of the penalty area, thereby avoiding the challenge of having to play over the penalty area.

## Explanation for Rule Change for 2019

### **27. Touching Loose Impediments or Ground in a Penalty Area**

**Current Rule:** When a player's ball is in a water hazard, Rule 13-4 provides (with exceptions) that the player must not:

- Test the condition of the water hazard,
- Touch the water or the ground in the water hazard with a hand or club, or
- Touch or move loose impediments that are in the water hazard.

**2019 Rule:** Under Rule 17:

- There will no longer be any special restrictions when a ball is in a "penalty area" (the expanded designation for the area that includes what are now called water hazards).
- A player will be allowed to touch or move loose impediments and touch the ground with hand or club (such as grounding the club right behind the ball) for any reason, subject only to the prohibition on improving conditions for the stroke (see new Rule 8.1a).

**Reasons for Change:**

- A strict prohibition on touching or moving loose impediments or touching the ground in a water hazard has never been practical, and so a series of exceptions had to be recognized in Rule 13-4 (see Exception 1), Rule 12-1 and various Decisions.
- This has created confusion and complications in applying the Rules, such as needing to decide when a player was or was not "testing", what constitutes touching "as a result of or to prevent falling", and similar questions about applying the many exceptions.
- The current prohibitions have led to penalties that some view 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 – which is not necessarily to require the player to face a more difficult challenge in playing the ball, but to address the practical need 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).