

Local Rule for Accidental Movement of a Ball on the Putting Green: Q&A

1) How does the Local Rule operate?

The Local Rule eliminates the penalty for any accidental movement of a ball or ball-marker on the putting green. If the ball was accidentally moved by the player, his partner, his opponent, or any of their caddies or equipment, there is no penalty and the ball is to be replaced and played from its original location.

2) Does the Local Rule apply to a ball moved by the wind?

No. If the ball was moved as a result of wind, water or some other natural cause (including gravity), the ball must be played as it lies from its new location without penalty.

3) Why is the Local Rule being introduced?

The movement of a ball on a putting green has been one of the many topics discussed as part of The R&A's and USGA's ongoing Rules Modernisation initiative to consider comprehensive changes to the Rules of Golf. For these particular situations, it was noted that the shape, slope and condition of many putting greens today increase the chances that a ball at rest on a putting green will move, and it can be difficult to determine whether a player caused the ball to move or whether the ball was moved by wind or other natural causes. Furthermore, when a ball moves while the player is doing nothing more than taking normal actions to prepare for a stroke, it may seem unfair for the player to be penalised.

4) Why not apply this Local Rule everywhere on the course?

As part of our continued review of the Rules related to ball movement, and in particular our Rules Modernisation initiative, it was noted that almost all "ball moved" instances occur on the putting green, and involve very minimal movement. Frequently, the movement occurs as the player is simply taking reasonable actions in preparing for a stroke and the ball can easily be replaced. These considerations are not the same when the ball lies off the putting green and we believe it is important to retain the penalty for those instances to reinforce the principle that the ball should be played as it lies.

5) Why not wait and change the Rule as part of the next Rules cycle?

As part of the Rules Modernisation initiative being pursued by The R&A and USGA, we plan to preview a comprehensive set of proposed changes in 2017. Given the significant ongoing issues that have arisen with the application of Rule 18-2 over the last several years, we concluded that this particular change should be available to all committees now, through the adoption of a Local Rule.

6) Rule 18-2 was just changed. Why are you now making an additional change through the Local Rule?

The Rules of Golf are an ever-evolving code, and Rule 18-2 is a good example. The most recent revision was the withdrawal of Rule 18-2b (ball moving after address) in January 2016. This change removed the presumption that the player caused the ball to move when it moved after being addressed. However, while this change was for the benefit of the player as it removed the automatic penalty, it has led to increased questions on what caused the ball to move, especially on the putting green. The Local Rule is now being introduced to put less emphasis on the cause of the ball's movement on the putting green.

7) Why not make this a permanent change to the Rules, instead of just a Local Rule?

The Rules of Golf are typically revised every four years, with the latest version taking effect in January 2016. The introduction of the Local Rule is outside the normal revision cycle and enables committees to eliminate the penalty for ball-moved situations on the putting green. While the relevant Rules are under consideration as part of the comprehensive Rules Modernisation project, we believed it was important to allow for committees to address this issue in advance of the full changes from that project taking effect.

8) Is the Local Rule only recommended for tournaments and elite level play?

No. While it is anticipated that the Local Rule will be widely adopted throughout the professional and elite-level amateur tournaments (including all USGA and R&A championships, qualifiers and international matches), its use is recommended for all levels of play. The adoption of the Local Rule is ultimately up to each individual committee's discretion.

9) Is the Local Rule in effect only if adopted for certain competitions?

Similar to other Local Rules (for example, the Local Rule for distance-measuring devices or the Local Rule that provides relief for an embedded ball through the green), the Committee in charge of the course must put the Local Rule into effect in order for it to apply. If the Committee does not put the Local Rule into effect, Rules 18-2, 18-3, 20-1, and the associated penalties, will apply for ball-moved situations on the putting green. If you are unsure if the Committee has adopted the Local Rule, you should ask the Committee or a member of the professional staff.

10) As a referee, how do I proceed when a player on the putting green calls me over and says his ball moved?

Just as before, you will need to weigh all available evidence for the given situation to determine whether the player was responsible for the ball's movement. As provided in Decision 18-2/0.5, a determination must be made if the player was more likely than not to have caused the ball to move.

If the player did cause the ball to move, next, you need to confirm if the movement was accidental. If the movement was accidental, the player incurs no penalty and must replace the ball. If the movement was not accidental, Rule 18-2 applies, and the player must replace the ball under penalty of one stroke.

If the player did not cause the ball to move, the ball is played as it lies unless some other Rule applies (e.g. Rule 18-1).

11) What types of actions are considered accidental?

Accidental movement can involve a variety of actions in which the player unintentionally moves his ball or ball-marker. Examples include: dropping the ball-marker on the ball, accidentally making contact with the ball when taking a practice swing near the ball, accidentally making contact when addressing the ball, etc.

12) What are some examples of actions that are not considered accidental?

The Local Rule does not apply to any intentional lifting or moving of the ball. Examples include striking or moving the ball in anger, lifting the ball without marking it, etc.