

NEW GOLF RULES FROM JANUARY 1, 2019

BUNKERS

In 2019, under Rules 12.2a and 12.2b, the player will be allowed to **touch or move loose impediments in a bunker** and will be generally allowed to touch the sand with a hand or club. But a limited prohibition continues so that the player must not:

- **Deliberately touch** the sand in a bunker with a hand, club, rake or other object to test the condition of the sand to learn information for the stroke, or
- **Touch the sand in a bunker with a club** in making a practice swing, in grounding the club right in front of or behind the ball, or in making the backswing for a stroke.

When taking relief for an unplayable ball in a bunker the player will have **an extra option**, allowing relief outside the bunker using the back-on-the-line procedure, but for a total of two penalty strokes (Rule 19.3b).

Reasons for change

The challenge of playing from a bunker is the need to play out of the sand, not to play with leaves, stones or other loose impediments in the bunker.

The current approach has created confusion by stating a total prohibition on touching the sand with a hand or club and then recognising many exceptions. The revised Rule will simplify this by prohibiting only those acts where there is a purpose for doing so under the Rules:

- Deliberately testing the condition of the sand with a hand or club will continue to be prohibited because part of the player's challenge is to assess and predict how the sand may affect the stroke, and also because it will be time consuming and inappropriate for players to dig in the sand with a hand or club for that purpose before every shot.
- Touching the sand with the club right in front of or behind the ball or in the backswing for the stroke will continue to be prohibited to make sure the player does nothing to reduce the challenge of playing from the sand; these prohibitions are already well known and followed by almost all players.
- Touching the sand with a club in taking a practice swing will continue to be prohibited both for pace of play and to avoid having large amounts of sand deposited outside bunkers (especially greenside bunkers) as a result of repeated practice swings.

It is not uncommon for a player to need to take unplayable ball relief in a bunker, such as when the ball is very close to the bunker wall or lip. Players usually take back-on-the-line or lateral relief under current Rule 28b or c, which has to be within the bunker, partly because it is time consuming and inconvenient to return to where the previous stroke was made from outside the bunker to take stroke and distance relief (Rule 28a). Once the player makes a stroke at the ball and it stays in the bunker, there is currently no longer any option for relief outside the bunker – especially tough if the ball lies in the very back of the bunker where it is almost impossible to gain any practical relief.

Playing from a bunker can be very difficult for some players, especially when the bunker has steep walls. This can present particular problems in stroke play because the player must finish the hole and so cannot simply pick up and move to the next hole after multiple tries to play the ball from the bunker. Giving those players an option for taking relief outside the bunker will allow them to keep playing rather than be disqualified.

This extra option will result in a total of two penalty strokes, to make sure that:

- The penalty is consistent with the significant amount of relief being allowed, and
- This option does not become commonly used by players who are able to play from a bunker.

In effect, the player who uses this extra relief option will be penalised one stroke for taking unplayable ball relief and one extra stroke for being allowed to take that relief outside the bunker using the back-on-the-line procedure.

This relief will be consistent with other Rules that provide that, when an obstruction or abnormal ground condition interferes with the play of a ball in a bunker, the player has the option to take free relief within the bunker itself or the extra option to take relief for one penalty stroke by playing from back-on-the-line outside the bunker