

## NEW GOLF RULES FROM JANUARY 1, 2019

### GREENS

In 2019, the New Rule 13.1c(2) allows **repair of almost any damage** on the green:

“**Damage on the putting green**” will be defined to include all types of damage (such as ball-marks, shoe damage, indentations from a club or flagstick, animal damage, etc). Exceptions to this include aeration holes, natural surface imperfections or natural wear of the hole.

The player is allowed to **repair damage** only with his or her hand, foot or other part of the body or a ball-mark repair tool, tee, club or similar item of normal equipment and must not unreasonably delay play.

The prohibition of **touching the line of play** on the putting green will be **eliminated**:

There will no longer be a penalty for merely touching the line of play on the putting green (the term “line of play” will apply everywhere on the course including the putting green, and the term “line of putt” will no longer be used).

But the player will still be subject to the prohibition on improving his or her line of play on the putting green (see Rule 8.1a, as limited by 8.1b).

New Rule 13.2a means there will **no longer be a penalty** if a ball played from the putting green **hits a flagstick** left in the hole. Players will not be required to putt with the flagstick in the hole; rather, they will continue to have the choice to have it removed (which includes having someone attend the flagstick and remove it after the ball is played).

#### **Reasons for change**

Because putting greens are specially prepared for playing the ball along the ground, the Rules allow the player to do things on the green that are not allowed anywhere else:

- Given this philosophy of allowing players to try to have a smooth surface for rolling the ball, there is no conceptual reason for prohibiting repair of many types of damage (whether made by players, animals etc.).
- This Rule change will eliminate the frequent questions among players and referees about whether a particular area of damage on the green is a ball-mark that may be repaired or is a shoe mark or other damage that must not be repaired.
- This change will also reduce the current tension between prohibiting a player from repairing damage while playing a hole and then encouraging the player to repair that damage (such as repairing the ragged edge of the hole or tapping down spike marks) as a courtesy to following groups or in care of the course.
- The Rule against unreasonable delay (as well as a Committee’s pace of play policy) can be used to address situations where a player seeks to make excessive repairs and cause unreasonable delay.

The change that will allow a player to repair almost all damage on the putting green is a further reason why the prohibition on merely touching the line of putt is no longer needed:

- No advantage is gained if a player or his or her caddie merely touches the surface of the putting green on the line where the ball will be played.
- Over time, the current prohibition on touching the line of putt has become subject to many exceptions and the current prohibition is difficult to administer and penalties are not often applied.

Allowing a player to putt with the flagstick in the hole without fear of penalty should generally help speed up play:

- For example, if a putt is long enough that the player cannot easily see the hole unless the flagstick is left in, the player currently needs to wait for another person to attend the flagstick even if it is the player's turn to play or (in stroke play) if the player is ready to play and it would save time to go ahead and do so.
- The current Rule can result in considerable delay, for example when all players in the group have long putts or the other player is delayed in coming to the green.
- In match play, a player will now be able to choose to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole rather than ask the opponent to attend the flagstick, reducing the potential for dispute that can arise when the opponent attends for the player (such as when the opponent fails to remove the flagstick and the ball hits it).
- On balance it is expected that there should be no advantage in being able to putt with the unattended flagstick in the hole.