



GUIDANCE ON RUNNING COMPETITIONS AFFECTED BY ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS



**Practical Guidance for
Competition Organising Committees and
Match & Handicap Conveners**

This practical guide on how to address adverse weather conditions arising before or during club competition days is designed to assist you both to understand and plan for the potential impact that such conditions may have on club and Open competitions that you run. This guide will also step you through some of the Rules of Golf, inc. Local Rules that offer assistance in dealing with such conditions.

This booklet provides guidance on:

DEALING WITH THE IMPACT OF ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS ARISING DURING A COMPETITION

- Safety & Dangerous Situations e.g. Lightning/Fog
- Casual Water
- Managing Suspension/Resumption of Play
- Use of squeegees
- Relocating holes or teeing grounds
- Flooded Bunkers

LONGER TERM / ONGOING PROBLEMS AND WINTER CONDITIONS

- Local Rules that can be invoked
 - Preferred Lies
 - Extension of relief for embedded ball relief to “through the green”
 - Introduction of “Lift, Clean and Replace”
- Declaring bunkers out of play for renovation
- Use of Fairway Mats
- Requirement to place ball from the fairway into the semi-rough
- Artificially surfaced teeing grounds

STRI – ADVICE FOR DEALING WITH SNOW/ICE ACCUMULATION ON GREENS

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INTRODUCTION

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. Recent years have clearly demonstrated that such problems are no longer only confined to the winter months and the impact of a changing climate is now also presenting club Committees with some major challenges during the summer months. Many of the queries received by Scottish Golf relate to inclement weather problems and often seek solutions that may or may not be permissible under the Rules of Golf or the CONGU® UHS. This document 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 its “Guidance on Running a Competition” available at: www.randa.org/en/Rules-and-Amateur-Status/Guidance-on-Running-a-Competition.aspx

Committees are advised to refer, in particular, to:

- Chapter 6 – Competition Administration – Sub-section 8, Inclement Weather and Suspensions of Play

In addition, Decisions on the Rules of Golf 33-1/2, 33-2d/1 and 33-2d/2 provide some further 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. 50% / 75% have completed their rounds.
- The Committee has no power to reduce the number of holes of a stipulated round once play has commenced on that round (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 situations. 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 – use of squeegees may enable a competition to be completed. (See below for further information on the 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 competition should be abandoned (CONGU® UHS Clause 18.7) and the result becomes CSS = SSS Reduction Only with handicap adjustments made only for competitors with a Nett Differential of less than zero. No handicap increases are applied where a competition is abandoned.
- 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 & Dangerous Situations – e.g. Lightning / Fog

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 discontinue play under Rule 6-8a if they believe there is danger from 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.

Committees' attention is drawn to Rule 6-8 and 33-2d in the event of dangerous situations that may arise during a competition. Committees may provide that in potentially dangerous situations play must be discontinued immediately following a suspension of play by the Committee – See Note to Rule 6-8b.

Specimen Local Rule wording is provided within the Rules of Golf, Appendix 1, Part C, Section 4, which can be found on p140.

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. Bad weather is not of itself a good reason for discontinuing play. 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 should 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 Referees 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 the requirement for the player to 'place the ball' should, therefore, be made clear to affected 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 Guidance on Running a Competition www.randa.org/en/Rules-and-Amateur-Status/Guidance-on-Running-a-Competition.aspx Chapter 6, sub-section 8 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

Increasingly flooded bunkers are providing Committees with problems either because bunkers are becoming flooded during a competition or because prior heavy rainfall has not drained away. The options available for Committees and players depend upon whether the flooding occurs prior to play or during play.

- Flooding occurring during play: In such situations the only relief available to players is through Rule 25-1b(ii) (see below).

- **Bunkers flooded prior to play:** Any bunkers that are partially-flooded or not flooded can only be left in play with relief available to players under Rule 25-1b(ii) as above. If, however, a few specific bunkers are fully-flooded then Decision 33-8/27 empowers Committees to make a Local Rule declaring specific fully-flooded bunkers as GUR and Through the Green thus revoking their status as bunkers/hazards. The decision makes it clear that:
 - This can only apply to specific identified bunkers that are fully-flooded at the outset and there is no reasonable likelihood of the bunkers drying up during the competition or round, and
 - It must be done prior to play commencing, and
 - It applies for the whole field (even if any of the affected bunkers dry out as the day progresses); and
 - It may be introduced or rescinded in separate rounds of a multi-round competition

The purpose of this decision is to enable Committees to cope with a few known extreme problem areas. When most of the bunkers are seriously affected by casual water the Committee should consider whether it is reasonable to hold a competition, particularly a *Qualifying Competition*, under such conditions – quite often there will be problems on other parts of the course as well. If the Local Rule is applied as intended by Decision 33-8/27, ie the “GUR, Through the Green” status is limited to a few selected and identified fully-flooded bunkers, then a competition may be played as a *Qualifying Competition* for handicap purposes.

Many players consider it unfair to be expected to play from partially-flooded bunkers and think that this will adversely affect their ability to post a score within their Buffer Zone. It should be remembered, however:

- (i) bunkers are hazards that are integral to the design of each course and that players should expect some form of challenge and/or penalty from hitting into these hazards
- (ii) that the CSS mechanism will take account of and reflect any widespread adverse effect on the day’s scoring, and
- (iii) that the Rules of Golf do provide a player with an exit route should casual water (or any other Abnormal Ground Condition) interfere with their lie, stance or intended swing in a bunker.

Relief under Rule 25-1b(ii):

Many players are not fully aware of their options under the provisions of this Rule when their next stroke is from a bunker is that affected by an Abnormal Ground Condition, including Casual Water. A player may:

Without penalty:

- Play the ball as it lies; or
- Lift and drop the ball within the bunker within one club-length and not nearer to the hole than the Nearest Point of Relief in the bunker; or
- If complete relief (ie lie, stance and area of intended swing) from the condition is not available, lift and drop the ball within the bunker as near as possible to where it lay in a position that is not nearer to the hole but which provides the maximum available relief from the condition.

Under penalty of One Stroke:

- Lift and drop the ball outside the bunker keeping the point in the bunker where the ball originally lay directly in line with the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped. There is no limit as to how far back behind the bunker the ball may be dropped.

LONGER TERM / ONGOING PROBLEMS AND WINTER CONDITIONS

Most ongoing problems relating to wetness of, or 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 obtained as appropriate, from:
 - Area/County Secretary, whom failing the Scottish Golf offices
 - National Course Rating Assessor, June McEwan

This permission should be obtained prior to any competition for handicapping purposes commencing, although in exceptional circumstances retrospective permission may be granted where it was impractical for the Committee to obtain permission prior to the event 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.

Permission to adopt preferred lies applies to the golf course and, therefore, to all membership sections within the club.

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 lies 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 National Governing Bodies, 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. To accommodate such work, without confusion over the status of the bunker, R&A Decision on the Rules of Golf 25/13 applies, which states:

“If a bunker is being renovated and the Committee defines the entire bunker as ground under repair, the bunker loses its status as a hazard and is automatically classified as “through the green”. Therefore, unless a Committee specifies otherwise, Rule 25-1b applies, not Rule 25-1b(ii).”

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 lift a ball from the fairway and drop or place in 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.



ADVICE FOR DEALING WITH SNOW AND ICE ACCUMULATION ON GOLF GREENS

Over recent Winter periods much of the UK has been subject to extreme weather conditions. Extended periods of snow cover and low temperatures (in some places as low as -21 °C) are now causing real concern for turf managers. Such extreme conditions are potentially damaging to fine turf and the main aim is to limit the level of damage.



Photo 1: Typical snow mould disease on fine turf

If the greens are covered in new snow the main concern would be the development of the disease snow mould (caused by the pathogen *Microdochium nivale* the same one that causes *Fusarium* patch disease). If a preventative fungicide was applied beforehand this is unlikely. However, untreated greens or those with active *Fusarium* patch before the snowfall may develop snow mould as the turf is insulated under the snow. If a disease attack becomes apparent after the thaw then a curative fungicide application will be required. Products containing the active ingredients iprodione applied at 20 l/ha or chlorothalonil at 30 l/ha should be applied for best control.

It is the prolonged period of frost and ice cover that is an unknown quantity for many turf managers in the UK. Photograph 2, overleaf, clearly shows a thick layer ice over a putting

surface. Although frustrating, our best advice in the majority of cases is to let nature take its course and wait for a thaw and then give time for recovery.



Photo 2: Thick ice cover on a putting surface

Trying to remove a solid cover of ice is not recommended for the following reasons:

1. In most cases it is impractical.
2. It is likely to cause further collateral damage to the greens surface (and possibly the surrounds if machinery is used).
3. The removal process can physically damage the turf cover especially when the grass is stuck into the ice.
4. It may actually expose the grass plants to even lower temperatures with the ice and snow cover acting as insulation.

In most cases the sensible approach is to do nothing and wait for a thaw. However, where deposits are deep, some careful chipping and removal by hand (as long as the work does not penetrate the turf canopy) may accelerate the ice removal process once the thaw eventually sets in.

When milder weather returns and the thaw begins then efforts should be made to accelerate the ice melt. To achieve this, spreading a dark sand or material such as charcoal onto the surface can help to absorb heat and literally melt the ice. Once the ice starts to melt, it is important to then remove any meltwater by pumping or by squeegee to take it away from the turf surface without causing any damage to the underlying turf.



As this is fairly uncharted territory in the UK we are unsure of the potential damage that may be caused. The extent of any damage will depend on each individual circumstance and, in particular, the sward composition of the greens. Annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*) dominated surfaces are particularly likely to suffer to a greater degree compared with bent and fescue surfaces which have been shown to survive under ice for 70 days in the US.

Once the ice has been removed, it will be important to provide some rest to the greens to allow the turf to overcome the period of stress and recover from any damage that may have occurred. Do not be tempted to open the surfaces for play too quickly.

If intensive overseeding or turfing is required then it will be important to communicate the situation to the club to set a realistic level of expectation for recovery time and playing standards in the meantime.

In some cases it may be clear that the problems have been exaggerated by shading from adjacent trees or by the poor drainage of the underlying soil and so measures to improve the situation and prevent reoccurrence in the future should be considered.

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