

Rules of the Road

Presented by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

Although the first golf car was invented in the late 1940s as a way for people with disabilities to get around a golf course, they have become a convenience enjoyed by millions of players. The National Golf Foundation estimates that about two-thirds of all 18-hole rounds are played with the use of a motorized golf car.

For your golf course superintendent, golf cars can present a challenge. When they are used improperly, they can cause serious damage to the course. More importantly, unsafe operation can lead to accidents and injuries.

- The National Golf Foundation estimates that about two-thirds of all 18-hole rounds are played with the use of a motorized golf car.
- Most courses have a standard golf car policy and sometimes employ temporary restrictions due to weather, construction or other factors.
- When used improperly, golf cars can cause serious damage to the course. More importantly, unsafe operation can lead to accidents and injuries.
- If you “drive friendly,” your golf car won’t impede the play of others.
- Golf course superintendents only put restrictions such as “Path Only” rules in place when they feel it’s necessary to protect the turf from damage.

The rules for safe operation are simple:

- Golf cars should only be operated from the driver’s side.
- Never carry more than two occupants or allow riders on the back of the car.
- Be sure your passenger is fully seated and check for obstructions before moving.
- Keep your entire body – particularly your feet – inside the car when moving.
- Drive slowly through turns and drive straight and slowly up and down slopes.
- Set the brake when coming to a complete stop.
- Use extra care when operating a golf car in reverse, or on hills, wet turf, loose surfaces or rough terrain.
- Remove the key when the golf car is not in use.
- Never operate a golf car when impaired by alcohol or drugs.
- Golf cars do not provide protection from lightning – seek appropriate shelter if lightning is present.

For the sake of your golf course, remember that golf car traffic can cause damage to the golf course that is both unsightly and expensive to repair. Tire ruts in soft, wet areas can take weeks to heal. Compaction caused by heavy traffic can ruin the playing surface. As a result, most courses have a standard golf car policy and sometimes employ temporary restrictions due to weather, construction or other factors.

If you “drive friendly,” your golf car won’t impede the play of others:

- Park your car behind or beside the green – never in front – to allow players behind you to hit sooner after you’ve finished the hole (You should generally always avoid driving a golf into the “approach” area 20 to 30 yards in front of the green.)
- Stop your vehicle to avoid distracting a nearby player who is preparing to hit a shot.
- Never drive into yards or neighboring properties.

Golf course superintendents only put restrictions such as “Path Only” rules in place when they feel it’s necessary to protect the turf from damage. On the other hand, there are some everyday guidelines that golfers can follow to maximize their golf experience and protect the turf.

“Superintendents know golf cars have become an important part of golf,” said GCSAA President Mark J. Woodward, certified golf course superintendent. “But golfers can be a big help in reducing the potential for damage to the turf from carts by simply following a few common-sense guidelines.”

- Never drive a golf car through standing water or on any obviously wet turf.
- Never drive onto a green, collar, tee or any marked hazard.
- Never drive into any area that has been recently seeded or sodded.
- Avoid abrupt stops and sharp turns that cause skidding.
- Spread out wear-and-tear by avoiding compacted areas.
- Watch for signs or other markers that direct traffic.
- Avoid driving over sprinkler heads and yardage markers.
- Don’t drive cars into out-of-play areas that may be environmentally sensitive (such as wildflower patches, native grass plantings and marshes).
- Keep all four tires on the path whenever possible. Do not park with tires off the path.
- Golfers with disabilities may be allowed access to areas not normally open to golf car traffic. Their cars are usually marked with a flag.

Golf courses located in residential areas frequently have cart paths that cross city streets. Golfers can minimize the risk of serious injury by remembering three things when crossing residential roads in their golf cars:

- Golf cars can be hard for automobile drivers to see.
- A person in a golf car is extremely vulnerable in an accident
 - It is a golfer’s responsibility to watch for oncoming traffic.

Motorized golf cars aren’t the only means for carrying golf bags. The USGA says the popularity of two-wheel and three-wheel pull carts is on the rise, especially as interest in health and fitness grows.

If your club permits pull carts – more than half of all private clubs allow them – are they being adequately controlled to protect the golf course? Pull carts are far lighter than motorized golf cars, but this does not mean pull carts do not damage turf. Because they are more maneuverable, golfers are more inclined to take them onto areas they would not normally drive golf cars.

Although many courses enforce the same rules for pull carts as for motorized golf cars, alternative policies can be developed. Pull carts should:

- have wide wheels (three to four inches) or air-filled tires,
- be kept 15 to 30 feet from the edges of tees and greens,
- be directed around green-side bunkers and not be taken into the narrow gaps between greens and bunkers,
- never be taken across excessively wet areas, and
- not be used following periods of heavy rainfall or under persistently wet conditions.