



Keeping carts away from greens reduces wear and helps protect some of the most important turf on a golf course.

TAMING RUNAWAY GOLF CARTS

BY DAVE OATIS | REGIONAL DIRECTOR, NORTHEAST REGION

Golf carts have become ingrained in golf for a variety of reasons. Some golfers require them because of health issues, whereas others take them out of habit or convenience. For hilly courses, or ones with long walks between greens and tees, carts may be a near necessity. Plenty of courses also depend on them for income.

What you may not know is that the cumulative effects of golf cart traffic mightily contribute to turf problems. Carts can be especially harmful when they are used during or immediately following inclement weather or when turf is weak or under stress. Careless cart usage can result in bodily harm and property damage; it also can be especially damaging to turf.

Thoughtful golf cart operation can minimize the negative impacts of cart traffic on the playability and aesthetics of a golf course; but being a good cart user takes concentration, awareness and a lot of practice. Here are a few simple tips to reduce your impact on turf health and course conditioning when using a golf cart:

- Pair up and ride with a friend. You may prefer to ride alone, but wear problems double when each golfer takes their own cart.
- Utilize cart paths whenever possible.
- Don't drive where everyone else drives. Concentrated traffic is far more damaging than traffic that is spread out over large areas, so make a concerted effort to take a different path.
- Watch where you're driving. Driving through a puddle, soggy area or very dry turf will magnify traffic injury, so try to avoid these and other sensitive areas. Look for directional signs and do your best to follow them.
- Keep all four wheels on the path. There is a tendency to pull just off the edge of paths when parking carts to make room for passing carts. However, it is best to stay completely on the path and let other carts to go off the path to pass if necessary. When carts are pulled just off the path repeatedly in the same location turf dies, soils erode and cart paths gradually get wider.
- If you can't find your ball, park your cart and look for it on foot. You'll probably have a better chance of finding the ball. circling around in a cart increases traffic injury.
- Stay out of naturalized areas. Driving carts through areas of tall grass and native vegetation can damage sensitive habitats, create playability issues and reduce aesthetics for a long time.
- Sudden stops, starts and sharp turns can be dangerous, especially at high speeds or on wet or uneven topography. Abrupt maneuvers also cause turf injury, so watch your speed and make wide turns.
- Keep carts away from greens, approaches and teeing surfaces.

Following these tips and each course's cart policy will help minimize your impact on turf conditions if you choose to take a cart. Leaving every course better than you found it should be the goal of every golfer, and good habits when you're behind the wheel of a golf cart can help tremendously.