



*Under the new Rules, loose impediments such as sticks or stones may be removed in a bunker.*

## NEW YEAR, NEW RULES

BY PAUL JACOBS | AGRONOMIST, NORTHEAST REGION

There were several [changes to the Rules of Golf](#) that took effect on January 1, 2019. Most of the changes are intended to make the Rules easier to understand and apply or to improve pace of play. Some of the changes are also likely to have an impact on course maintenance. Below are a few of the key changes that relate to course care, and some information about what superintendents and golfers should be prepared for this season.

**[Repairing Damage on the Putting Green:](#)** Golfers will now be able to repair the putting surface that may be damaged for various reasons including maintenance equipment, old hole plugs, animal damage, spike marks, damage from the flagstick and ball marks. This change will be welcomed by superintendents and golfers alike because putting surfaces are prepared to provide a smooth surface in the morning, but imperfections are inevitably – and often inadvertently – created throughout the day. However, golfers still cannot improve their line of play beyond repairing damage. This means that you will still not be able to repair aeration holes, natural surface imperfections or natural wear of the hole.

**Ball Played From Putting Green Hits Unattended Flagstick in the Hole:** Golfers can now putt from on or off the putting green with the flagstick in the hole without incurring a penalty if the ball strikes the flagstick. Whether to putt with the flagstick in or out will be a personal preference, but all golfers should practice good etiquette and carefully remove the ball from the hole with their hand, not by rapidly removing the flagstick. Doing so can damage the hole for following groups, especially if there is more than one ball in the hole.

**Areas the Committee May Mark as Penalty Areas:** Under the new Rules, “water hazards” have been superseded by the expanded concept of “penalty areas.” Penalty areas include all previously defined water hazards and lateral water hazards, but also give the Committee the ability to define other areas, such as heavily wooded areas, canyons or native areas as penalty areas. By doing so, a ball lost or not playable in a penalty area can be played outside the area with a one-stroke penalty.

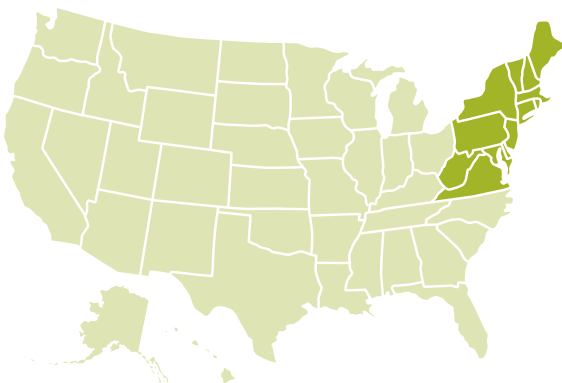
**Moving or Touching Loose Impediments in a Bunker:** Loose impediments such as leaves, pine needles, sticks or stones may now be touched or moved in a bunker. This change alleviates some of the burden placed on maintenance teams to provide bunkers that are free of debris. Even when the maintenance staff clean bunkers in the morning, debris may collect throughout the day that they cannot immediately address. This change in the Rules allows the golfer added flexibility to address these situations on their own, without penalty.

In addition to the changes mentioned above, there were several others made that golfers and superintendents should become familiar with. For a complete list of changes and details about the changes, please visit [www.rulesofgolf.com](http://www.rulesofgolf.com).



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