

# Marking by the Rules: How to Set Up Your Course for Competition AND Everyday Play

*Imagine going to a football game and the players take to a field with no sidelines or yard lines. Are the players on the field really playing football? Similarly, picture a tennis match with no lines defining the boundaries of the court. If this actually happened at a football game or tennis event, the players in each sport would have an extremely difficult time playing by the rules.*

In this analogy, the game of golf is no exception. In order for a golf course to be ready for competition, it must be marked and boundaries clearly defined. The committee in charge of play (usually the golf course superintendent and PGA professional) must ensure that the course has been properly marked and any special Rules situations accounted for.

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Marking a golf course completely and properly can be an arduous task. However, defining the boundaries, hazards and abnormal conditions can relieve the committee from addressing any potential conflicts or questions that might otherwise arise. The following are some general guidelines for marking and setting up a golf course for competition and everyday play.

## **What's Out-of-Bounds?**

Defining the boundaries of the golf course is clearly one of the most important tasks for the committee. In most cases, the property line of the golf course defines the out-of-bounds. If this is the case, a fence sometimes accompanies the property line. When a fence defines the boundary, the golf course edge of the fence posts determines the out-of-bounds line. Otherwise, the committee must define the boundaries of the golf course with white stakes and/or a white line.

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It is a common misconception that areas within the property line of the course should not be defined as out-of-bounds. It is perfectly acceptable to mark clubhouses, tennis courts and parking lots as out-of-bounds. It is also permissible to establish out-of-bounds between two holes for safety reasons or to maintain the integrity of a given hole.

When using white stakes to define out-of-bounds, it is suggested to place them a minimum of 30 yards apart. At times it is necessary to place the stakes closer together to afford a line of sight from stake to stake. This is the most essential, and most overlooked, factor when defining out-of-bounds. If a boundary line makes many turns, it is suggested to tie the stakes in with a white painted line rather than pounding in hundreds of stakes. Not only will this save time, but it also erases any ambiguity about whether a ball is in or out-of-bounds. Marking out-of-bounds can take an extensive amount of time and effort, but in most cases it is much more straightforward than differentiating and defining water hazards or declaring areas as abnormal ground conditions.

### The Wherefores of Water Hazards

There are two types of water hazards: lateral water hazards, marked with red stakes and lines, and regular water hazards, marked with yellow stakes and lines. The principal task when marking a golf course is determining if the hazard should be defined as a lateral or a regular water hazard. In order to do this effectively, the person marking the hazard must have a firm understanding of the options available to a player under Rule 26. A basic guideline to follow for lateral water hazards is this: the body of water must be situated so that it is not possible for a player to drop a ball behind the hazard *and* keep the point at which the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard between the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped. An example of this might be a creek that runs parallel to the hole where the terrain on the opposite margin is heavily wooded. In such a case, a player would have to use the stroke and dis-

tance option unless the creek was defined as a lateral hazard.

Once the committee has designated whether a water hazard shall be considered lateral or regular, it is time to mark the hazards with stakes and painted lines. It is essential to paint red or yellow lines to indicate the margin of the hazard because players must be able to determine the specific point where the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard in order to proceed correctly under the Rules. The lines should be painted so that they include in the hazard not only the water, but also the bank and the unkempt growth related to the hazard. This is most often accomplished by placing the line where the ground breaks to form the boundary of the hazard. Also, bushes or trees with roots immediately adjacent to the natural margin of the hazard should be included in the hazard. Otherwise, a player whose ball entered the hazard in this area would not have a reasonable place to drop a ball. It is unfair to penalize players twice by having a poorly marked hazard that does not afford the player a sufficient place to drop a ball.

Generally speaking, when marking water hazards it is best that stakes should be used to identify the hazard and lines should be used to define the margins of the hazard. If a body of water is considered both a regular and a lateral hazard, then a red and yellow stake should be placed side by side to indicate where the hazard changes

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from regular to lateral (see photo below). In other rare occasions, a water hazard is considered environmentally protected. The criteria for marking and defining these areas are slightly different from regular and lateral water hazards.

### Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)

In exceptional instances, a governmental authority such as the Army Corps of Engineers or the Environmental Protection Agency will declare wetlands or other parts of the golf course as Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs). If ESAs pre-





sent on the course are defined as water hazards, it is recommended that adequate signage and barriers to entry be posted around the area. Also, to differentiate ESAs from other hazards, it is important to paint the tops of the stakes green.

Sometimes, certain areas of some golf courses are mistaken for or mis-marked as water hazards or environmental areas. In most cases, these are “natural” or “no-mow” areas that the golf course has grown out for aesthetic purposes. In most cases, the areas are left to grow with native grasses and plants that serve to beautify the course and provide sanctuary for birds and other animals. These areas, unless they are immediately adjacent to a hazard, should be left unmarked and considered “through the green.” (See photo above.)

Areas on the golf course that are not ESAs but that the committee would like protected from players can be addressed in the Local Rules sheet. Flower beds and young trees are two examples of where the committee

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may wish to prohibit players from playing a stroke if the swing or stance might interfere and damage a flower or tree. The committee must be sure to mark the trees or flower beds with a painted line or stake and indicate on the rule sheet how the players should proceed if they are interfered with by these conditions.

Abnormal ground conditions, such as ground under repair, also require consideration from the committee in charge of course marking and set-up. Before marking any ground under repair, it is vital to tour and thoroughly scrutinize the entire golf course. The reason for this is, with ground under repair it is better to be certain of the areas that need to be marked *before* anything is marked. Generally speaking, it is preferable to be conservative with the markings than to have little white circles all over the course. Bare spots in the rough are, in most cases, not abnormal and thus should not be marked. The person most qualified to mark ground under repair is nearly always the superintendent, as he or she is

familiar with any construction or other abnormal conditions on the golf course. Areas that are freshly sodded or seeded should be identified and a Local Rule written that prohibits play from these areas.

Marking a golf course can take a great deal of time and effort. Ultimately it is time well spent, because a golf course that is properly and thoroughly marked, whether for tournament play or everyday play, helps all golfers adhere to the Rules of Golf. Marking areas clearly and correctly can also serve to speed up the pace of play by eliminating ambiguities as to whether a ball is out of bounds, in a hazard or in an abnormal ground condition. Simply put, golf courses should be marked at all times to give every golfer the ability to play by the Rules.



*Dan Hardy is the director of rules and competitions for the CDGA.*

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