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## PRACTICE FACILITY GUIDELINES

For golf to thrive, many say the construction decade of the 1990s should be followed by the instruction decade of the 2000s. I see an increased demand for new, or improved, practice areas at public, private and resort facilities. At public facilities, practice areas can provide learning programs and increase revenues. At private and resort facilities, they can provide superior practice conditions.

Good practice facilities are necessary to attract play. Recently, we renovated a public course to add a driving range because business surveys showed the facility lost play and range use to nearby courses with practice areas. We located the new range close to the clubhouse and parking lot to maximize off-the-street, range-only business. A costly rerouting was needed to accomplish this, but the business plan suggested it was necessary.

Space requirements make adding a practice range to an older course tricky. Modern driving ranges use 15 to 17 acres, compared to 10 to 12 acres a decade ago. Increased distance suggests driving ranges should be longer than 300 yards. For divot recovery, tees should be 45 to 60 yards deep. If tees are at both ends, total range length should exceed 400 yards. For years, the standard was 300 yards.

Recognizing that the greater volume of range balls hit – thousands per day versus 100 to 250 on golf holes – increases the potential of impacts from wayward balls, ranges are widening to increase safety. Ranges are better placed in the interior of a layout rather than in border areas because golfers, generally, are more aware of their surroundings and potential dangers while they're playing.

Distance is a better safety buffer than netting, mounding and plantings for use next to roads, parking lots or surrounding property. Most errant shots land within 15 degrees of the intended line, but a few stray as far as 22.5 degrees off line. Thus, driving range tees should curve inward to

direct shots toward the center of the range, and landing areas should be at least 500 feet wide (wider than 600 feet is preferred) based on potential stray shots.

Sheer size doesn't make the ideal range, though. Besides safety, a range should be located in an area where mature tree loss during construction is minimized and the potential for lost range balls to creeks, forests or native areas during ongoing operations is minimized, too. However, remote locations can affect operating costs because of increased cart use, vandalism and theft.

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Ranges should be near the clubhouse for golfer convenience and visual control, near the first (and, if possible, the 10th) tee and consistent with general traffic flow. To distribute use evenly, the main access point should be centered rather than at one end, which tends to concentrate use on the near side.

The ideal range is aligned in the north-south direction to avoid facing the sun, and aligned into prevailing winds to shorten typical shots and produce the best practice environment for good players. Headwinds accentuate offline shots, assisting with swing evaluation.

The modern practice facility provides more than an open field on which to hit balls. The setting should be equal in quality to a good golf hole, ideally playing over a slight valley and slightly downhill for visibility. It should allow the golfer to see

the ball land and roll out for feedback and replicate the playing experience:

- A target fairway similar to the golf course in terms of turf, width, etc.
- Target greens, shaped to the style and almost the size of the course, and ideally with bunkers, if maintenance cost isn't prohibitive, at various distances with good distance marking from multiple tee spots for distance assessment.

- A private lesson tee that's secluded, yet convenient.
- An indoor video and teaching area.
- Tee areas replicating course conditions.
- Uneven and sloped lies on the fairway and rough.
- An area to practice hitting out from under trees.

- A fairway practice bunker, best aimed out into the range for ease of ball pick up.

A short-game practice area should be located near the main range, and also should simulate the on-course experience:

- A practice chipping green with all surroundings found on the course:
  - Fairway chipping areas
  - Rough
  - Mounds, grass bunkers, cross, uphill and downhill slopes, etc.

- Greenside sand bunkers, because skulled shots should land in safe areas.
- A 30- to 120-yard wedge game practice area marked in 5-yard increments to practice distance control.

Creature comfort is important. Details such as portable shades, fans and mist systems in summer and enclosed covered hitting areas for winter are popular. Refreshment stands stocked with water and sunscreen, chairs, bag stands, club cleaners, in-ground trash receptacles and a visible clock to ease fears of not being on the first tee on time all add character and function.

Making the short-game areas and a portion of the practice tee ADA accessible is required and is a good idea because many disabled golfers use the range only. Truthfully, I'd be tempted to confine my golf to an ideally designed range as well. **GCI**