



Restricting Golf Carts To Paths

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In recent years, our superintendent has restricted carts to paths following heavy rainfall. This year, we are in a drought and, again, we have been occasionally restricted to cart paths. Is there a reason why (or when) we are restricted to cart paths?

One of the most difficult decisions superintendents must make throughout the golf season is whether to allow cart traffic or restrict them to paths. No golfer is happy with cart restrictions, but decisions on cart traffic are always made with the best long-term interest of the turf, golf facility and, ultimately, the golfer, in mind.

There are multiple reasons why cart traffic, even just a few carts, can cause damage to turf areas that could require considerable time and expense to fix. Some damage is immediately evident, e.g., soil rutting, whereas other traffic damage reveals itself after the fact, e.g., frost, while other effects are cumulative and lead to gradual turf decline, e.g., soil compaction. The following is a brief list of common instances when cart traffic restrictions are warranted:

- Following heavy rain or during prolonged periods of wet weather when soils are saturated, soft and most prone to compaction.
- During extreme heat or drought stress when turf is easily damaged by traffic.
- Whenever frost is present because ice crystals, under the pressure of traffic, can puncture live plant tissue that will result in, at the very least, temporary discoloration of leaves or, at worst, plant death.
- Fungal disease pressure is high because some diseases can be spread quickly across the golf course through tire traffic.
- Any other time when turf is under extreme stress or in the process of recovery, whether it is from environmental pressure, mechanical injury or pest damage.

These are just a few examples, all of which result in noticeable damage to the golf course. The road to recovery for damaged turf is rarely pretty so if it can be avoided by simply exercising a

little caution to temporarily restrict cart traffic, it makes sense to do so. In fact, this is the reason for cart paths in the first place, so it is wise to use them whenever the turf or soil is most vulnerable to damage. Trust the professional expertise of your superintendent and knowledgeable course officials. They are responsible for providing the best quality turf and playing conditions possible, not just today but tomorrow as well.

Useful Resources:

[Letting the Numbers Tell the Story on Cart Damage](#)

[Traffic...How Much Can You Bare?](#)

[Common Sense Cart Paths](#)