

WA Golf Preferred Lies Recommendation



As the leader and primary resource in promoting and providing opportunities for anyone interested in the game of golf in Washington and Northern Idaho, Washington Golf (WA Golf) strongly recommends that when establishing conditions of play, golf clubs and tournament organizers adhere to the Rules of Golf as approved by the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the R&A.

One of the primary principles of the Rules of Golf is to “play the ball as it lies,” which WA Golf also strongly recommends in most instances. However, when extreme weather or lack of golf course maintenance for long periods make it necessary for golf clubs and tournament organizers to consider adopting a Preferred Lies (also known as “Winter Rules”) Local Rule for use, WA Golf recommends using [Model Local Rule E-2 or E-3](#) or a combination thereof, listed below, which are recommended by the USGA under Committee Procedures in the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf (page 465-467).

Because conditions differ depending on the season and situation, WA Golf’s Rules & Competition Department stands ready to extend assistance and make recommendations with regard to adopting a Preferred Lies Local Rule.

It is important to note that any Preferred Lies Local Rule other than Model Local Rule E-2 or E3 or a combination thereof, especially one that advocates improving the lie of the ball in the rough, is contrary to the Rules of Golf and we are unable to recommend, endorse or interpret its use.

E-2 – Cleaning Ball

Found in the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf (page 465-466)

Purpose. When conditions such as wet ground conditions throughout parts of the course may cause mud to stick to the ball, the Committee can choose to allow the player to lift, clean and replace the ball in the general area. Such relief should be limited to those portions of the course where needed.

While the Local Rule for Preferred Lies (Model Local Rule E-3) is designed for use only in areas cut to fairway height or less in the general area, this Local Rule can be used throughout the general area or restricted to specific areas. The Committee could choose to use both Local Rules permitting preferred lies in the fairways and cleaning the ball elsewhere in the general area.

It is not advisable to implement this Local Rule once play has begun for a stroke-play round. Doing so would allow players who had more holes to play the advantage of using it for a longer period of time. The Local Rule could be implemented once a match has begun between the play of two holes as opponents have an equal benefit.

For guidance on when and how this Local Rule may be used in order for scores to be submitted for handicapping purposes (for example, if it must be limited to fairway only), consult the rules or recommendations contained within the Handicap System.

Model Local Rule E-2

When a player’s ball lies in [identify area, such as the general area, at the 6th hole, in the general area cut to fairway height or less, etc.], the ball may be lifted cleaned and replaced without penalty. The player must mark the spot before lifting the ball (see Rule 14.1) and the ball must be replaced on its original spot (see Rule 14.2).

E-3 – Preferred Lies

Found in the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf (page 466-467)

Purpose. When occasional local abnormal conditions might interfere with fair play, the affected parts of the course can be defined as ground under repair. But adverse conditions such as heavy snow, spring thaws, prolonged rains or extreme heat can sometimes damage the course or prevent use of heavy mowing equipment.

When such conditions are widespread on the course, the Committee can choose to adopt a Local Rule for “preferred lies” (also known as “winter rules”) to allow fair play or help protect the fairway. Such a Local Rule should be withdrawn as soon as conditions allow.

The use of this Local Rule outside the fairway in the general area is not recommended as it may result in a player receiving free relief from areas where a ball might otherwise be unplayable (such as in areas of bushes or trees).

It is not authorized to implement this Local Rule once play has begun for a stroke-play round. Doing so would allow players who have more holes to play the advantage of using it for a longer period of time. The Local Rule could be implemented once a match has begun between the play of two holes as opponents have an equal benefit.

For guidance on when and how this Local Rule may be used in order for scores to be submitted for handicapping purposes (including the size of the relief area and if it may only be used in the fairway), consult the rules or recommendations contained within the Handicap System.

Model Local Rule E-3

When a player’s ball lies in a part of the general area cut to fairway height or less [or identify a specific area such as ‘on the fairway of the 6th hole’], the player may take free relief once by placing the original ball or another ball in and playing it from this relief area:

- *Reference Point: Spot of the original ball.*
- *Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point: [Specify size of relief area, such as one club length, one scorecard length or 6 inches] from the reference point, but with these limits:*
- *Limits on Location of Relief Area:*
 - *Must not be nearer the hole than the reference point, and*
 - *Must be in the general area.*

In proceeding under this Local Rule, the players must choose a spot to place the ball and use the procedures for replacing a ball under Rules 14.2b(2) and 14.2e.

In addition, WA Golf offers the following recommendations, considerations, and clarifications when considering whether or not to adopt a Preferred Lies Local Rule:

Recommendations – WA Golf considers the following when deciding whether or not to invoke a Preferred Lies Local Rule for our championships or when making a recommendation:

- Preferred Lies should NOT be invoked if an abnormal ground condition is confined to a small area on the course. Such areas should be deemed ground under repair.
- Adverse conditions such as the aftermath of heavy snows and spring thaws, prolonged rains or extreme heat can make fairway conditions unsatisfactory or prevent heavy mowing equipment from being used to maintain the course. When such conditions are prevalent throughout the course, **Model Local Rule E-3** may be used to lift, clean, and improve the lie of the ball in closely mown areas.
- If course conditions are such that an inordinate amount of mud is collecting on the golf ball, then **Model Local Rule E-2** may be used to lift, clean and **REPLACE** the ball on its original spot.

- Some have requested we recommend one single standard of measurement when improving the lie of the ball in **Model Local Rule E-3** (e.g., six inches, one club length, etc.). However, it is important this discretion be left to the golf club or tournament organizer, as conditions differ from day to day and course to course. While six inches may work one day, a full club length may be needed another.
- Under some circumstances, **Model Local Rule E-2 and E-3** may be adopted for use at the same time. This will allow the marking, lifting, cleaning and improving the lie of a ball in closely mown areas (**Model Local Rule E-3**), while also allowing the marking, lifting, and replacing of a muddy ball in the general area (in the rough) (**Model Local Rule E-2**).
- The use of **Model Local Rule E-2 and E-3** may be confined to a specific area of the course (e.g., at the sixth hole only, etc.). There is no requirement they be used throughout the entire course.
- **WA Golf strongly discourages improving the lie of the ball in the general area (in the rough).** It is a fact that when the lie of a ball is improved from a poor lie in the rough to one which is “teed up” only serves to provide an unfair advantage to a golfer who has hit a poor shot, artificially lowers handicaps, and places golfers at a disadvantage when competing elsewhere.
- Additional Local Rules are also available (Committee Procedure, Part IV, Section 6) that help deal with poor course conditions or course protection including, [Relief from Aeration Holes \(E-4, page 467-468\)](#) and [Relief from Seams of Cut Turf \(F-7, page 481\)](#).

Considerations – A Preferred Lies Local Rule should only be invoked after careful consideration and only when warranted.

Consultation – WA Golf encourages golf clubs and tournament organizers to contact the WA Golf Rules & Competition staff at the WA Golf offices in Federal Way, Washington for further assistance with a specific recommendation.

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