

2004 Rules Changes

Removing a loose impediment can still cost you a stroke

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To move or not to move: A pine cone perched precariously on a ball over pine straw is a recipe for disaster.

There are two key things to know in the understanding of this rule:

1. Rule 18 covers situations in which a ball at rest is moved. At any time during the play of a hole, if a player takes an action that causes his ball to move (other than with a stroke or in applying a rule that permits the ball to be lifted) he is subject to a one-stroke penalty and the ball must be replaced.

2. This does not pertain to situations in which a ball lies in a bunker, a water hazard, or a lateral water hazard. In those situations, a player is prohibited from even touching any loose impediments without suffering a two-stroke penalty. It covers situations in which a player removes loose impediments “through the green” (see USGA Rules of Golf definitions and Rule 13-4).

So many people we have talked to think that with this rules change if a ball moves when a player removes a loose impediment within a club-length—no problem and no penalty—just play the ball from its new position. This is NOT the case. The only thing that has changed is the automatic penalty that occurred when you removed the loose impediment—you were “deemed” to have caused it to move—whether or not you actually did anything physically that would have resulted in the ball’s movement. It is still a matter of fact, whether you have taken an action to cause that ball to move. ■

NOW THAT THE CHANGES have been in effect for a few months there have been some interesting discussions and questions that we have encountered. As with any changes, there is always the potential for confusion in the translation, I’m going to try to clear up one misunderstanding.

“REMOVING A LOOSE IMPEDIMENT THROUGH THE GREEN WITHIN A CLUB LENGTH OF THE BALL.”

Prior to 2004 Rule 18-2c stated that if the ball moved after any loose impediment within a club-length of the ball lying through the green was removed by the player, his partner or either of their caddies before the player had addressed it, the player was **deemed** to have caused the ball to move. There was a one-stroke penalty and the player was required to replace the ball.

This section was completely removed in 2004. There is no longer any reference to removing a loose impediment within a club-length of the ball.