

For MISGA Associates -

Most Important Changes to the Rules of Golf for 2008

The USGA Rules of Golf were amended on January 1, 2008. Most of the changes are relatively minor. But a few changes will possibly impact normal play.

Lifting a Ball in a Hazard to Identify (Section 12-2) --

The most notable change, which will affect most golfers, allows the lifting of a ball in a hazard to identify it (which was prohibited under the 2004 version).

But that section also requires that before a ball is lifted, our intention to lift to identify must be announced to our opponent or a fellow competitor and the opportunity must be given to him to observe the lifting and replacement of the ball. Also, the condition of the ball's lie must be rebuilt to its original condition (applies mainly to bunker lies). (Penalty for breach of these steps: match play - loss of hole; stroke play - two strokes.)

So remember, now you can lift your ball in a hazard to identify it.

And don't forget to announce to your fellow-competitor or opponent that you're going to lift it to identify it and give him the opportunity to observe the lifting and replacement of the ball.

Wrong Ball (Rule 15-3) --

A very important corresponding change to Rule 15-3 (Wrong Ball) removes the exemption from the penalty for playing a wrong ball in a hazard.

Because we now have the opportunity to identify our ball in a hazard without penalty, the change to 15-3 penalizes us for hitting a wrong ball in a hazard (match play - loss of hole; stroke play - two strokes).

So, remember, you should identify your ball in the hazard, if you're in any doubt whether it's your ball, to avoid the penalty for playing a wrong ball from a hazard.

Distance Information is Not "Advice" --

The definition of "advice" has been changed to essentially allow the exchange of any distance information between any golfers in a group, regardless of whether they are opponents or fellow-competitors. Now, distance information is not considered "advice," including (incredibly) the distance between a golfer's ball and the hole (Decision 8-1/2). (The 2004 definition of advice only excluded distance information

So, now you can talk all you want about distance, with anyone, without penalty.

- Dick Crone

MISGA Rules and Handicap Chairman