

RULE 16

Relief from Abnormal Course Conditions (Including Immovable Obstructions), Dangerous Animal Condition, Embedded Ball

Purpose of Rule:

Rule 16 covers when and how the player may take free relief by playing a ball from a different place, such as when there is interference by an abnormal course condition or a dangerous animal condition.

- These conditions are not treated as part of the challenge of playing the course, and free relief is generally allowed except in a penalty area.
- The player normally takes relief by dropping a ball in a relief area based on the nearest point of complete relief.

This Rule also covers free relief when a player's ball is embedded in its own pitch mark in the general area.

16.1 Abnormal Course Conditions (Including Immovable Obstructions)

This Rule covers free relief that is allowed from interference by *animal holes*, *ground under repair*, *immovable obstructions* or *temporary water*:

- These are collectively called *abnormal course conditions*, but each has a separate Definition.
- This Rule does not give relief from *movable obstructions* (a different type of free relief is allowed under Rule 15.2a) or *boundary objects* or *integral objects* (no free relief is allowed).

16.1a When Relief Is Allowed

(1) Meaning of Interference by Abnormal Course Condition. Interference exists when any one of these is true:

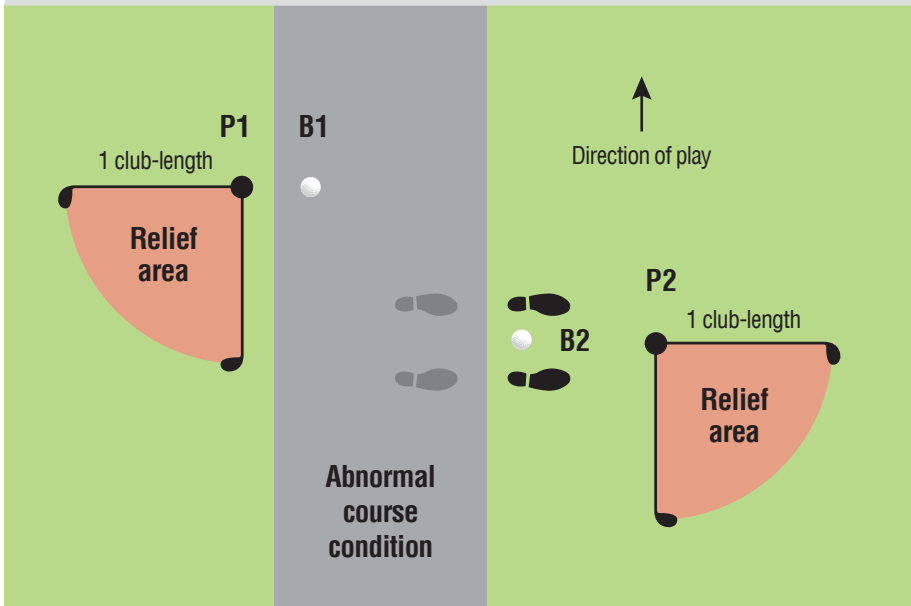
- The player's ball touches or is in or on an *abnormal course condition*,
- An *abnormal course condition* physically interferes with the player's area of intended *stance* or area of intended swing, or
- Only when the ball is on the *putting green*, an *abnormal course condition* on or off the *putting green* intervenes on the *line of play*.

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If the *abnormal course condition* is close enough to distract the player but does not meet any of these requirements, there is no interference under this Rule.

See Committee Procedures, Section ___ (the *Committee* may adopt a Local Rule denying relief from an *abnormal course condition* that only interferes with the area of intended *stance*).

FIGURE 16.1: RELIEF FROM ABNORMAL COURSE CONDITIONS (INCLUDING IMMOVABLE OBSTRUCTIONS)



The diagram assumes the player is right-handed and the ball is in the general area. Relief is allowed for interference by an abnormal course condition (ACC), including an immovable obstruction, when the ball touches or lies in or on the condition (B1), or the condition interferes with the area of intended stance or swing (B2). The nearest point of complete relief for B1 is very close to the condition (P1). For B2, it is farther from the condition as the stance has to be clear of the ACC.

(2) Relief Allowed Anywhere on Course Except When Ball Is in Penalty Area.

Relief from interference by an *abnormal course condition* is allowed under Rule 16.1 only when both:

- The *abnormal course condition* is on the *course* (not out of bounds), and
- The ball is anywhere on the *course*, **except** in a *penalty area* (where the player's only relief is under Rule 17).

(3) No Relief When Clearly Unreasonable to Play Ball. There is no relief under Rule 16.1:

- When playing the ball as it lies would be clearly unreasonable because of something other than an *abnormal course condition* (for example, when a player would be unable to make a *stroke* because of where the ball lies in a bush), or
- When interference exists only because the player chooses a club, type of *stance* or swing or direction of play that is clearly unreasonable under the circumstances.

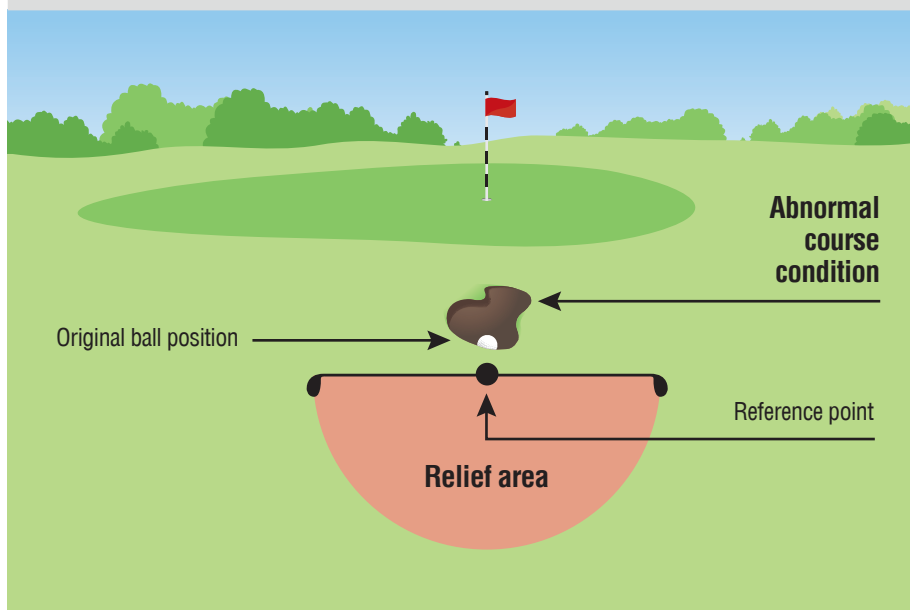
See Committee Procedures, Section ___ (the *Committee* may adopt a *Local Rule* allowing free relief from interference by temporary immovable obstructions on or off the *course*).

16.1b Relief for Ball in General Area

If a player's ball is in the *general area* and there is interference by an *abnormal course condition* on the *course*, the player may take free relief by *dropping* the original ball or another ball in this *relief area* (see Rule 14.3):

- Reference Point: The *nearest point of complete relief* in the *general area*.
- Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point: One *club-length*, **but** with these limits:
- Limits on Location of Relief Area:
 - » Must be in the *general area*,
 - » Must not be nearer the *hole* than the reference point, and
 - » There must be complete relief from all interference by the *abnormal course condition*.

FIGURE 16.1: RELIEF FROM ABNORMAL COURSE CONDITION IN GENERAL AREA



When the ball is in the general area and there is interference by an Abnormal Course Condition (ACC), relief can be taken without penalty. The nearest point of complete relief should be identified and a ball must be dropped and played from the relief area, which is within one club-length of that reference point, no nearer the hole. The relief area must be in the general area, and provide complete relief from the interference by the ACC.

16.1c Relief for Ball in Bunker

If a player's ball is in a *bunker* and there is interference by an *abnormal course condition* on the *course*, the player may take either free relief under (1) or penalty relief under (2):

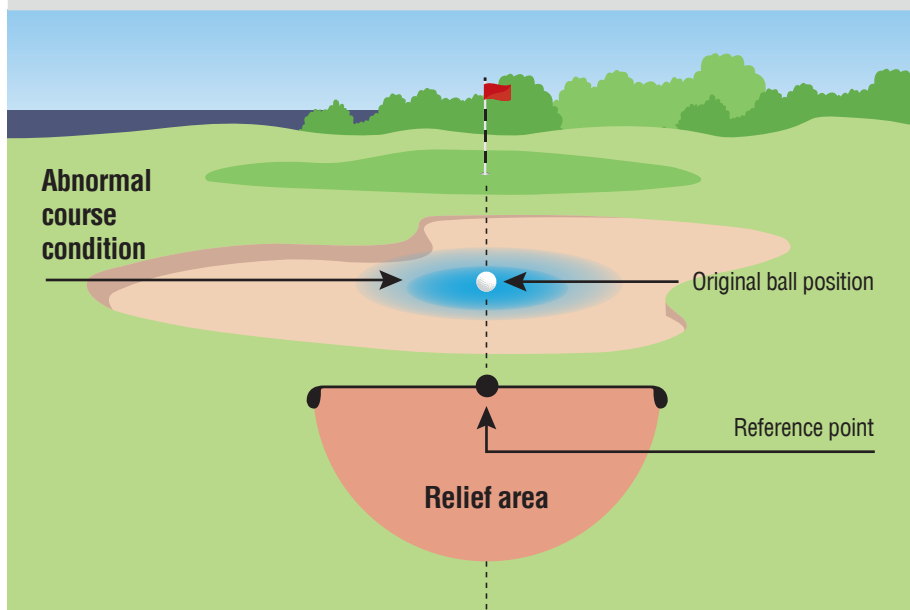
(1) Free Relief: Playing from Bunker. The player may take free relief under Rule 16.1b, **except** that:

- The *nearest point of complete relief* and the *relief area* must be in the *bunker*.
- If there is no such *nearest point of complete relief* in the *bunker*, the player may still take this relief, by using the *point of maximum available relief* in the *bunker* as the reference point.

(2) **Penalty Relief: Playing from Outside Bunker (Back-On-the-Line Relief).** For **one penalty stroke**, the player may *drop* the original ball or another ball (see Rule 14.3) in a *relief area* based on a reference line going straight back from the *hole* through the original spot of the ball:

- Reference Point: A point on the *course* chosen by the player that is on the reference line and is farther from the *hole* than that original spot (with no limit on how far back on the line):
 - » In choosing this reference point, the player should indicate the point by using an object such as a *tee*.
 - » If the player *drops* the ball without having chosen this point, the reference point is treated as being the point on the line that is the same distance from the *hole* as where the *dropped* ball first touched the ground.
- Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point: One *club-length*, **but** with these limits:
- Limits on Location of Relief Area:
 - » Must not be nearer the *hole* than the reference point, and
 - » May be in any *area of the course*, **but**
 - » If more than one *area of the course* is located within one *club-length* of the reference point, the ball must come to rest in the *relief area* in the same *area of the course* that the ball first touched when *dropped* in the *relief area*.

FIGURE 16.1: RELIEF WITH PENALTY FROM ABNORMAL COURSE CONDITION IN BUNKER



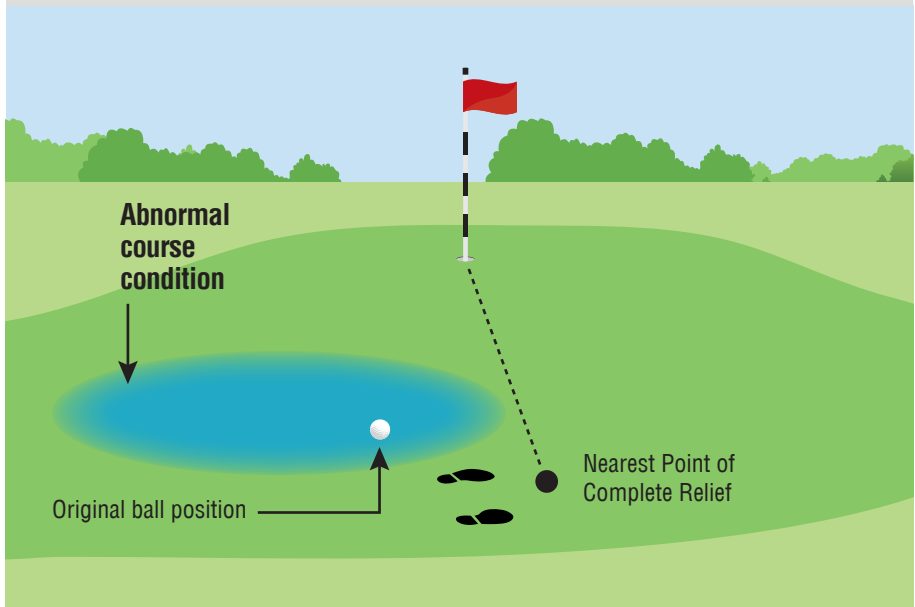
When there is interference from an abnormal course condition in a bunker, relief may be taken outside the bunker for one penalty stroke. A reference point on the reference line is chosen, with no limit to how far back on the line the reference point may be. A ball must be dropped in and played from the relief area, which is within one club-length of and not nearer the hole than the reference point.

16.1d Relief for Ball on Putting Green

If a player's ball is on the *putting green* and there is interference by an *abnormal course condition* on the *course*, the player may take free relief by placing the original ball or another ball on the spot of the *nearest point of complete relief*, using the procedures for *replacing* a ball under Rule 14.2b(2) and 14.2e.

- The *nearest point of complete relief* must be either on the *putting green* or in the *general area*.
- If there is no such *nearest point of complete relief*, the player may still take this free relief by using the *point of maximum available relief* as the reference point, which must be either on the *putting green* or in the *general area*.

FIGURE 16.1: RELIEF FROM ABNORMAL COURSE CONDITION ON PUTTING GREEN



When a ball is on the putting green and there is interference by an abnormal course condition (ACC), relief without penalty may be taken by placing a ball on the spot of the nearest point of complete relief. That point must be either on the putting green or in the general area. Whether the ball is placed on the putting green or in the general area, relief must also be taken for interference from the line of play.

16.1e Relief for Ball Not Found but in or on Abnormal Course Condition

If a player's ball has not been found and it is *known or virtually certain* that the ball came to rest in or on an *abnormal course condition* on the *course*, the player may use this relief option instead of taking *stroke-and-distance* relief:

- The player may take relief under Rules 16.1b, c or d, using the estimated point where the ball last crossed the edge of the *abnormal course condition* on the *course* as the spot of the ball for purposes of finding the *nearest point of complete relief*.

- Once the player puts another ball *in play* to take relief in this way:
 - » The original ball is no longer *in play* and must not be played.
 - » This is true even if it is then found on the *course* before the end of the three-minute search time (see Rule 6.3b)

But if it is not *known or virtually certain* that the ball came to rest in or on an *abnormal course condition* and the ball is *lost*, the player must take *stroke-and-distance* relief under Rule 18.2.

16.1f Relief Must Be Taken from Interference by No Play Zone in Abnormal Course Condition

In each of these situations, the ball must not be played as it lies:

(1) When Ball Is in No Play Zone. If the player's ball is in a *no play zone* in or on an *abnormal course condition* in the *general area*, in a *bunker* or on the *putting green*:

- No Play Zone in General Area. The player must take free relief under Rule 16.1b.
- No Play Zone in Bunker. The player must take free relief or penalty relief under Rules 16.1c(1) or (2).
- No Play Zone on Putting Green. The player must take free relief under Rule 16.1d.

(2) When No Play Zone Interferes with Stance or Swing for Ball Anywhere on Course Except Penalty Area. If a player's ball is outside a *no play zone* and is in the *general area*, in a *bunker* or on the *putting green*, and a *no play zone* (whether in an *abnormal course condition* or in a *penalty area*) interferes with the player's area of intended *stance* or area of intended swing, the player must either:

- Take relief if allowed under Rules 16.1b, c or d, depending on whether the ball is in the *general area*, in a *bunker* or on the *putting green*, or
- Take unplayable ball relief under Rule 19.

For what to do when there is interference by a *no play zone* for a ball in a *penalty area*, see Rule 17.1e.

Penalty for Playing Ball from a Wrong Place in Breach of Rule 16.1: General Penalty under Rule 14.7a.

16.2 Dangerous Animal Condition

16.2a When Relief Is Allowed

A “dangerous *animal* condition” exists when a dangerous *animal* (such as poisonous snakes, stinging bees, alligators, fire ants or bears) near a ball could cause serious physical injury to the player if he or she had to play the ball as it lies.

A player may take relief under Rule 16.2b from interference by a dangerous *animal* condition no matter where his or her ball is on the *course*, **except** that relief is not allowed:

- When playing the ball as it lies would be clearly unreasonable because of something other than the dangerous *animal* condition (for example, when a player would be unable to make a *stroke* because of where the ball lies in a bush), or
- When interference exists only because the player chooses a club, type of *stance* or swing or direction of play that is clearly unreasonable under the circumstances.

16.2b Relief For Dangerous Animal Condition

When there is interference by a dangerous *animal* condition:

(1) When Ball Is Anywhere Except Penalty Area. The player may take relief under Rules 16.1b, c or d, depending on whether the ball is in the *general area*, in a *bunker* or on the *putting green*.

(2) When Ball Is in Penalty Area. The player may take free relief or penalty relief:

- Free Relief: Playing from Inside Penalty Area. The player may take free relief under Rule 16.1b, **except** that the *nearest point of complete relief* and the *relief area* must be in the *penalty area*.
- Penalty Relief: Playing from Outside Penalty Area.
 - » The player may take penalty relief under Rule 17.1d.
 - » If there is interference by a dangerous *animal* condition where the ball would be played after taking this penalty relief outside the *penalty area*, the player may take further relief under (1) without additional penalty.

For purposes of this Rule, the *nearest point of complete relief* means the nearest point (not nearer the *hole*) where the dangerous *animal* condition does not exist.

Penalty for Playing Ball from a Wrong Place in Breach of Rule 16.2: General Penalty under Rule 14.7a.

16.3 Embedded Ball

16.3a When Relief Is Allowed

(1) **Ball Must Be Embedded in General Area.** Relief is allowed under Rule 16.3b only when a player's ball is *embedded* in the *general area*.

- There is no relief under this Rule if the ball is *embedded* anywhere except in the *general area*.
- **But** if the ball is *embedded* on the *putting green*, the player may *mark* the spot of the ball and lift and clean the ball, repair the damage caused by the ball's impact, and *replace* the ball on its original spot (see Rule 13.1c(2)).

Exceptions – When Relief Not Allowed for Ball Embedded in General Area:

Relief under Rule 16.3b is not allowed:

- When the ball is *embedded* in sand in a part of the *general area* that is not cut to fairway height or less, or
- When interference by anything other than the ball being *embedded* makes the *stroke* clearly unreasonable (for example, when a player would be unable to make a *stroke* because of where the ball lies in a bush).

(2) **Determining Whether Ball Is Embedded.** A player's ball is *embedded* only if:

- It is in its own pitch-mark made as a result of the player's previous *stroke*, and
- Part of the ball is below the level of the ground.

If the player cannot tell for sure whether the ball is in its own pitch-mark or a pitch-mark made by another ball, the player may treat the ball as *embedded* if it is reasonable to conclude from the available information that the ball is in its own pitch-mark.

FIGURE 16.3: WHEN A BALL IS EMBEDDED**Ball is embedded**

Part of the ball (embedded in its own pitch-mark) is below the level of the ground.

← Level of Ground

**Ball is embedded**

Despite the fact that the ball is not touching the soil, part of the ball (embedded in its own pitch-mark) is below the level of the ground.

**Ball is NOT embedded**

Even though the ball is sitting down in the grass, relief would not be available because no part of the ball is below the level of the ground.

A ball is not *embedded* if it is below the level of the ground as a result of anything other than the player's previous *stroke*, such as when:

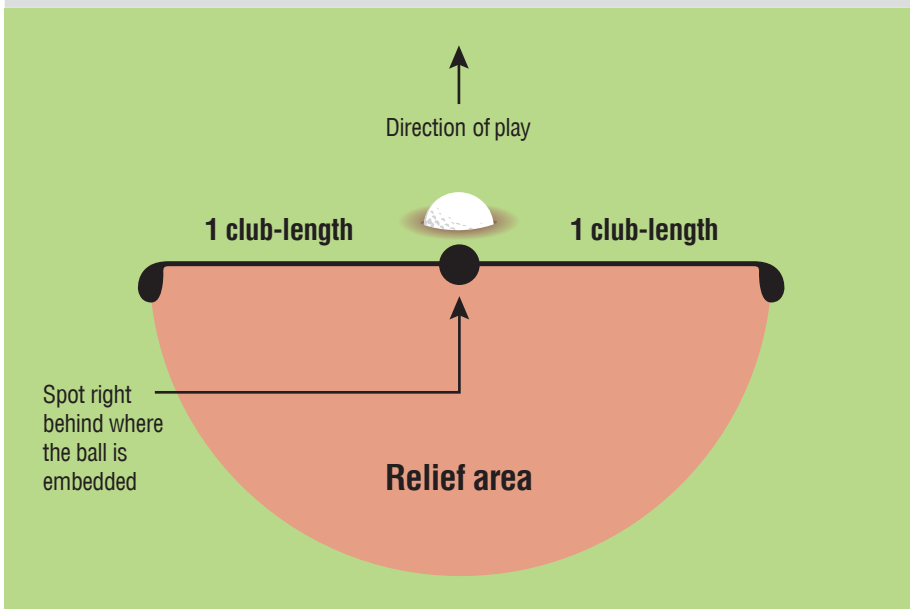
- The ball is pushed into the ground by someone stepping on it,
- The ball is driven straight into the ground without becoming airborne, or
- The ball was *dropped* in taking relief under a Rule.

16.3b Relief for Embedded Ball

When a player's ball is *embedded* in the *general area* and relief is allowed under Rule 16.3a, the player may take free relief by *dropping* the original ball or another ball in this *relief area* (see Rule 14.3):

- Reference Point: The spot right behind where the ball is *embedded*.
- Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point: One *club-length*, **but** with these limits:
 - » Must be in the *general area*, and
 - » Must not be nearer the *hole* than the reference point.

FIGURE 16.3: RELIEF FOR EMBEDDED BALL



When a ball is embedded in the general area, relief may be taken without penalty. The reference point for taking relief is the spot right behind where the ball is embedded. A ball must be dropped in and played from the relief area, which is within one club-length of that reference point, no nearer the hole. The relief area must be in the general area.

See **Committee Procedures, Section ___** (the *Committee* may adopt a Local Rule allowing relief only for a ball *embedded* in an area cut to fairway height or less).

Penalty for Playing a Ball from a Wrong Place in Breach of Rule 16.3: General Penalty under Rule 14.7a.

16.4 Lifting Ball to See If It Lies in Condition Where Relief Allowed

If a player reasonably believes that his or her ball lies in a condition where free relief is allowed under Rules 15.2, 16.1 or 16.3, but cannot decide that without lifting the ball:

- The player may lift the ball to see if relief is allowed, **but**
- The spot of the ball must first be *marked*, and the lifted ball must not be cleaned (**except** on the *putting green*) (see Rule 14.1).

If the player lifts the ball without having this reasonable belief (**except** on the *putting green* where the player may lift under Rule 13.1b), he or she gets **one penalty stroke**.

If relief is allowed and the player takes relief, there is no penalty even if the player did not *mark* the spot of the ball before lifting it or cleaned the lifted ball.

If relief is not allowed, or if the player chooses not to take relief that is allowed:

- The player gets **one penalty stroke** if he or she did not *mark* the spot of the ball before lifting it or cleaned the lifted ball when not allowed, and
- The ball must be *replaced* on its original spot (see Rule 14.2).

Penalty for Playing Incorrectly Substituted Ball or Playing Ball from a Wrong Place in Breach of Rule 16.4: General Penalty under Rules 6.3b or 14.7a.

If multiple Rule breaches result from a single act or related acts, see Rule 1.3c(4).