



Guidance Information on the Functionality of Distance-Measuring Devices for 2016

In conjunction with the changes to the Rules of Golf effective January 1, 2016, specifically the Local Rule permitting the use of distance-measuring devices under Rule 14-3, the USGA and The R&A are providing recommendations to assist manufacturers and developers of laser rangefinders, GPS devices, mobile GPS applications and other electronic distance-measuring devices (DMDs).

Revised Rule for 2016

Further to our Notice to Manufacturers dated May 12, 2015, the USGA and The R&A have revised Appendix IV, Section 5 to provide that, when a Local Rule permitting the use of DMDs is in effect, there is a breach of Rule 14-3 only if a player uses the device to access information that is prohibited by that Rule. Therefore, effective from January 1, 2016, functions which were previously prohibited from residing on a DMD, may now reside there, provided that such functions are not accessed by the player during the stipulated round. Such prohibited functions include, but are not limited to:

- the gauging or measuring of slope;
- the gauging or measuring of other conditions that might affect play (e.g., wind speed or direction);
- the gauging or measuring of a player's physical or mental state, such as heart rate;
- recommendations that might assist the player in making a *stroke* or in his play (e.g., club selection, type of shot to be played, green reading or any other advice-related matter); or
- calculating the effective distance between two points based on elevation changes or other conditions affecting shot distance.

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Interpretation of the New Rule

Important points to note, concerning *actual use of prohibited information versus functionality of the device* (all assuming the Local Rule for DMDs is in effect):

1. A player may use a device that contains prohibited functions (examples listed above) provided these specific functions are not accessed by the player during the stipulated round. “Access” is interpreted to mean that the player has viewed or otherwise used the information generated by a prohibited function, or the player uses a device where such output is displayed.
2. Questions will arise if permitted and prohibited functions are not effectively separated on the device.
3. Such questions will put the player at risk of being considered in breach of the Rules.
4. If, for example, information generated by a prohibited function is permanently or regularly on display to a player during normal interaction with a device during a stipulated round, the player has “used” that information. This would include devices which are both carried and worn (e.g., a multi-functional watch).
5. If, however, a device contains two separate applications, one of which contains only permitted functions, the other certain prohibited functions, the player would only be in breach of the Local Rule if he accesses the latter application.
6. Presence of an icon of a prohibited application or function within a menu screen would not normally be considered to be a breach of the Local Rule.
7. The same principles, above, apply to audible information.

Recommendations for Manufacturers

The following recommendations are made to assist manufacturers and developers to reduce the risk that a player will be in breach of the Rules when using any DMD device or application. The list is not comprehensive and other solutions may be considered acceptable upon evaluation.

1. Practice Mode vs. Play Mode

It is highly recommended that manufacturers of DMDs incorporating prohibited functionality also incorporate play and practice mode settings into their designs. In the “play mode”, any functions that, if accessed, would result in the player breaching Rule 14-3 are disabled. In the “practice mode”, such functions may be accessed. It is also recommended that there is a visible display or physical indication that clearly signifies which mode the device is in (e.g., an icon, color-code, etc.). This would assist in ensuring that the player does not inadvertently access a function that would result in penalty.

2. On/Off Mode for Specific Features

A secondary recommendation/option is that manufacturers of DMDs ensure that any functions that, if accessed by the player, would result in the player breaching Rule 14-3 are capable of being turned off/disabled. As previously noted, if prohibited information generated by such a function is accessed by the player, the player would be in breach of Rule 14-3.

3. Require the Player to Toggle to the Prohibited Function

A third recommendation/option is that manufacturers of DMDs limit player access to the output generated by any functions that, if accessed by the player, would result in the player breaching Rule 14-3. In this case, the manufacturer could require that the player must take a specific action in order to view information generated by such functions (e.g., by using a toggle or pressing a button to deliberately display information that would, if accessed, cause the player to breach Rule 14-3). Taking such a specific action would cause the player to be in breach of the Local Rule.

4. Provide Appropriate Warnings to Players

In all cases, we highly recommend that manufacturers of DMDs incorporating functionality that, if accessed by the player, would result in the player breaching Rule 14-3, include appropriate warnings regarding the risk of penalty, either on the device or in the application, and/or in the instruction material provided with the device or application. Any such warnings should be specific to the operation of the device or application.

Future Submissions

Device manufacturers and app developers are encouraged to submit the details of their new product concepts to the USGA or The R&A as early as possible in the development cycle so that the product can be reviewed against the Rules of Golf and the above recommendations. Please be advised that, for such products, there are a variety of methods available for review (e.g., screen shots, a PowerPoint presentation, a test environment for an app, etc.). In order for us to provide any meaningful feedback on any device or application, full details of the functionality must be shared, in addition to a physical sample or an active app test environment.

Should you have any questions regarding the above, please e-mail Carter Rich, Director, Equipment Rules and Conformance, at jcrich@usga.org.