

United States Golf Association

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Notice to Manufacturers

New Groove Regulations

The USGA has decided to adopt new regulations covering grooves on clubs. Under these revisions, most of the current rules governing grooves remain unchanged with two additional provisions: restrictions on groove cross sectional area and groove edge sharpness on applicable golf clubs.

In February 2007 the USGA issued a Notice to Manufacturers regarding proposed revisions to the Rules of Golf governing grooves on clubs. This followed the publication of extensive research work on this subject by the USGA and The R&A. Since February 2007, additional research has been undertaken and published by the USGA and The R&A. A number of manufacturers and other interested parties have provided their comments about the proposed rule changes to the USGA. These comments have been very helpful and have resulted in significant modifications to the originally proposed rule changes.

The Statement of Principles issued jointly by the USGA and The R&A in May 2002, states that the purpose of the Rules is “to prevent an over-reliance on technological advances rather than skill and to ensure that skill is the dominant element in determining success throughout the game.” The new groove rules have been developed with regard to the results of our research into spin generation, ongoing analysis of highly skilled play, and these important principles.

The objective of this change is to limit the effectiveness of grooves on shots from the rough to the effect of the traditional V-groove design, without mandating the use of only V-grooves. The new regulations permit club designers to vary groove width, depth, spacing and shape to create clubs that conform to this groove rule.

Applicable Clubs

1. Both new regulations apply to all clubs that meet one or both of the following criteria:
 - a. Clubs marked, advertised, or specified to have lofts of 25 degrees or higher.
 - b. Clubs with lofts measuring 25 degrees or higher.
2. Only the new cross-sectional area regulation applies to clubs with lofts less than 25 degrees.
3. Current groove regulations covering maximum width, maximum depth, and minimum spacing continue to apply to all clubs. Neither of the two new regulations applies to driving clubs or putters.
4. Determination of loft is to be made by the USGA according to the attached procedure.
5. In accordance with previous agreements, clubs manufactured before March 31, 1990 that meet the criteria of USGA Decision USGA/4-1/100, such as the Ping Eye 2, will be treated by the USGA as conforming to the Rules of Golf and will continue to be acceptable for all USGA competitions.

A more detailed explanation of the rule changes and measurement method is attached.

Implementation

1. These new groove rules become effective for all new clubs covered by this rule change that are manufactured on or after January 1, 2010.
2. A Condition of Competition requiring the use of clubs that conform to the new groove rules for competitions conducted after January 1, 2010 will be added to the USGA Rules of Golf. The USGA recommends that this Condition initially apply only to competitions involving expert professional players at the highest level of competition.
3. The U.S. Open, U.S. Women's Open, and the U.S. Senior Open will adopt the new groove regulations for championships conducted after January 1, 2010, per the expert Condition of Competition. This includes all qualifying events for these championships.
4. All other USGA championships will apply the Condition of Competition requiring the new groove regulations for competitions beginning January 1, 2014.
5. Currently conforming clubs manufactured prior to January 1, 2010 may continue to be used in all situations wherein the Condition of Competition is not in effect until at least 2024. The final decision regarding the ongoing status of these clubs will be reviewed no sooner than 2020. If it is determined at that time (or later) that the rule change should apply to all clubs, there would be a minimum 4-year implementation period.

Changes from Original Proposal

The following rule parameters that form the new regulations have been changed from the original proposal based on comments received during the Notice and Comment period.

	Original Proposal	Final New Regulations
(i) Groove cross sectional area/Spacing	0.0025 in ² /in	0.0030 in ² /in
(ii) Edge radius	0.010” radius with 0.001” deviation permissible	0.010” radius with as much as 0.0013” deviation permissible (see details in the attached procedure)
Applicable clubs	All except drivers	a. Clubs with loft ≥25 degrees: (i) and (ii) b. Clubs with loft <25 degrees: (i) only c. Drivers: Neither (i) nor (ii)
Condition of Competition in USGA events	January 1, 2009	a. January 1, 2010: U.S. Open, U.S. Senior Open, U.S. Women’s Open b. January 1, 2014: All amateur USGA competitions
Status of currently conforming clubs	Conforming until 2020	Conforming until at least 2024

Additional information

Measurement of grooves for cross sectional area and groove edge radius can be made with the same tracing equipment that the USGA has used for a number of years. The USGA may also make use of additional measuring equipment for this purpose in the future. A field test to enable groove measurements on-site has been developed. The protocol for this field test will be published in the near future.

Questions regarding the revised groove regulations should be addressed to the USGA, attention Dick Rugge, P.O. Box 708, Far Hills, NJ 07931, Fax 908-234-0138, e-mail: drugge@usga.org.