

Seeing RED on the golf course?

By Richard E. Todd

Are you unsure what each colored stake on the golf course means?
Are you hesitant on how to proceed under the rules for each?

If you are faced with your ball in an area defined by red stakes or red lines, officially called a lateral water hazard (USGA rule#26), think of a red stop sign to help you get out trouble.



When you are driving a car and you come upon a stop sign at a four-way intersection, what are your choices? You can go left, right, forward, backwards, or stay where you are. Guess what? Those are the same options you have on the golf course, with some additional explanation provided.

*Left – One option is to drop a replacement ball within two club lengths of where the ball last crossed into the margin of the water hazard. That's not the same as saying where the ball splashed down or landed. Find where the ball last flew over the part of the course that was playable before entering the LWH, draw a line straight down and use that spot as your point of reference. Assuming the water is on your right, you would drop on the left side of it. Remember to not drop nearer the hole than this point and that the ball must not roll closer to the hole. Re-drop if the later happens.

*Right – This is probably the least known option. Similar to 'left', you can drop your ball, even with the point where your ball last crossed the margin of the water hazard, on the *opposite* side of the water hazard. Remember to stay equidistant with the hole regardless of where you drop.

*Backward – Put it in reverse and go back to where you last hit your ball. Usually, this will be on the tee box. This is more commonly known as 'stroke and distance'.

*Forward – You can drop your ball behind the water hazard, keeping the point at which the ball last crossed the margin of the water hazard directly between the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped, with no limit as to how far behind the water hazard you can go. You're actually dropping backwards but you have to look forward at the flagstick to get your line.

Each of the above options comes with a one stroke penalty, added on to your original stroke that landed you in the hazard.

*Stay – Just like the person that sits at a stop sign way too long, you can stay and play your ball as it lies. Just because you are in a water hazard, or even in water, doesn't mean your ball is unplayable. Sometime you sneak out of trouble, like when the police pull over the car behind you.

Just remember the rules of the road when you next meet trouble with red stakes on the golf course and you'll drive away without a ticket.

Looking for more great explanations on the rules? Check out TheGolfRules.com.
Water hazards are defined in the USGA's *Rules of Golf* book under rule 26.

Richard Todd is the author of *The Golf Rules*, an entertaining and educational series of books on stroke play, match play, and golf etiquette. He has been trained on the rules of golf by the USGA and the PGA, has been heard on the PGA Tour radio station and seen in print and electronic media sources. Follow him on Facebook, Twitter, WordPress, and YouTube at www.TheGolfRules.com.