

# WAVING THE RED FLAG

*A cart use policy for golfers with physical limitations.*

by **PAT GROSS**

**R**EQUIRING carts to stay on the paths at all times is the dream of most golf course superintendents. It is frustrating to get the course in great condition only to see widespread damage caused by out-of-control golf carts. It makes superintendents want to wave the white flag of surrender.

Instead, Woodland Hills Country Club, in Woodland Hills, California, is waving the *red* flag. Steve Sinclair, CGCS; Kerry Hopps, head golf professional; and the board of directors have developed a program for issuing a red flag to golfers with physical limitations so they can drive on the fairways while still enforcing stricter rules for other golfers who use carts. For many years, Woodland Hills Country Club had a policy requiring carts to stay on the paths at all times, especially on holes one through nine. This policy was devised to reduce excessive turf wear and soil compaction due to narrow, shaded, clay soil fairways.

Like most clubs, Woodland Hills Country Club has some golfers with legitimate physical limitations who require an exception to the rule of limited cart access to the fairways. Unfortunately, some members without physical limitations abused the policy, resulting in additional and unnecessary damage to the golf course. As a compromise, a new program was developed involving a four-step application and review process. It is designed to help those who need assistance while weeding out potential abuses.

Step #1: If a golfer wants to be issued a red flag, the first step is to get an application package from the club. The package contains information that describes the procedure for obtaining a red flag, outlines the cart use rules, and includes an evaluation form that must be filled out by a doctor. The applicant is issued a yellow flag for two weeks to allow access to the fairways while the application is being reviewed.

Step #2: Have a doctor complete the medical evaluation form. The doctor must certify that the patient suffers a medical disability that limits his or her activity level on the golf course. Potential medical conditions include:

- Knee/hip surgery.

- Lumbar disc surgery.
- Neuromuscular disorders.
- Pulmonary disease.
- Other specified disabilities.

The doctor also must list the anticipated duration of the recovery. Golfers are reevaluated every six months to retain their privileges. The doctor evaluation form and the six-month reevaluation are key aspects of the program.

Step #3: The red flag committee evaluates each application. The committee includes members from the golf committee, green committee, disciplinary committee, a physician who is a member of the club, as well as the superintendent and head golf professional. The physician serves as a peer review to avoid abuses and is another important aspect of the program.

Step #4: After the application is approved, the golfer is issued a numbered red flag that can be used only by the designated golfer. The flags are approximately 12" wide and printed with a prominent white number, which is easily seen from a distance. The flags attach to the cart roof supports with velcro strips. A local manufacturer made the flags for Woodland Hills Country Club for approximately \$20 each.

Red flag users must ride alone or with another red or yellow flag user. If cart use rules are violated, a staff member

or fellow golfer can report the incident by simply reporting the flag number. Sanctions are imposed for violating cart rules, including a written warning for the first violation, a two-month revocation of privileges for the second violation, and permanent revocation of privileges for the third violation.

Although the red flag policy has been in effect for less than a year, the club has already benefited from the program. There have been fewer abuses of the cart rules, resulting in better course conditions. The new policy also has created an objective system that provides assistance to golfers with physical limitations. Other major reasons for the success of the program include the doctor evaluation form, having a physician on the review committee, and the six-month review of golfers with red flags. The policy at Woodland Hills Country Club is a reasonable compromise that allows people to enjoy the game without excessive damage to the course from unrestricted cart use. Hopefully, it can do the same for your golf course.

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*At Woodland Hills Country Club (Woodland Hills, Calif.), golfers with legitimate physical limitations can apply for a numbered red flag that allows them to drive off the cart paths. Application for a red flag involves a four-step process that includes a medical evaluation form that must be completed by a physician.*