

RESPECT THE ICE AND THE ICE TECHNICIAN

Fundamentally curling is a game that depends on two major elements: Stones and Ice. Brooms, slider, and grippers are useful, but curling predates the use of any of these. Therefore we should respect and care for the stones and ice above all else.

Stones are specially ground pieces of granite mined in only one of two places in the world. Historically the majority of curling stone granite came from the island of Ailsa Craig off the west coast of Scotland.



As of 2004, 60 to 70% of all curling stones in use were made from granite from the island. However, the island has now been designated as a bird sanctuary and quarry blasting is prohibited. The Scottish government has allowed the gathering of granite that was previously blasted and stone are still produced from Ailsa Craig granite. The Trefor quarry of Northern Wales has also been a major supplier of granite. The Canada Curling Stone Co. has sole access to this granite and is one of the world's largest producers of curling stones.

From the USA curling rules:

“A curling stone is of circular shape, having a circumference no greater than 36 in., a height no less than 4.5 in., and a weight, including handle and bolt, no greater than 44 lbs. and no less than 38 lbs.”

The only part of the stone in contact with the ice is the *running surface*, a narrow, flat ring, 0.25 to 0.50 inches wide and about 5 inches (130 mm) in diameter. All stones also have a strike band around the circumference of the stone with a slightly rougher surface to minimize rock damage as it contacts other stones. If treated well and resurfaced occasionally, a curling stone will be useful for many years of curling.

You should make it a habit to clean the running surface of the stone immediately prior to throwing that stone. This is generally done with your broom with the purpose of removing dirt or particles that could damage the ice and/or affect the movement of the stone down the sheet.

Where curling stones are relatively easy to maintain and rarely cause problems, the **ice** upon which they slide is a constant concern of all curling clubs. The majority of all curling clubs, including KMCC, have a Head Ice Technician whose job it is to oversee the care and preparation of the ice on a daily basis. The Head Ice Technician at our club is a volunteer position. This hard-working individual is supported by a crew of assistants. Curlers sometimes fail to consider that they come to a curling rink to play on curling ice which is product of science, knowledge, expensive and important equipment, and of course many hours of hard work and dedication. Never mind the heat or cold, wet or dry, wind or rain, sun or snow, the humble ice technician has to provide curling ice of unbelievable consistency every day for every game on every sheet. Because most of his work is usually done prior to the arrival of league curlers, many curlers are simply not aware of the Herculean task associated with the job. The information presented below was obtained from the Scottish Curling – Ice Group web site (<http://www.scottishcurlingicegroup.org/>).

To support the “Ice Man” and his crew and ensure that all curlers have access to the best possible ice, please read the notes below and do all you can to protect the ice and your fellow curlers.

Hands and knees

Resting your knee on the ice even for a few seconds will leave a distinctive indentation in the ice surface. Some curlers will rest a knee or hand on the ice watching the progress of their stone down the length of the ice – it only takes a few seconds to melt the ice. Hand marks range from a single finger to full hand and forearm. Knees covered in clothing will absorb the water from the melted surface to leave a hole, while hand marks will leave the water behind to refreeze into unwanted bumps on the ice surface. These indentations and bumps are likely to deflect a stone. Wearing a knee pad or gloves might not be comfortable, but it would certainly help. The best and simplest solution is to never place your hand or knee on the ice.

Clothing and footwear

Fuzzy hats and fleece jackets WILL shed on the ice. This stuff will be picked up by a stone; it is only a matter of time before they alter the path of a beautiful stone and destroy the shot.

Outdoor shoes WILL bring in dirt and salts that will affect the ice surface. One tiny grain of sand is enough to chip a precision ice scraping blade, and one sole covered in salt from the outside pavement can contaminate a very large area of the ice surface. Once dirt has frozen to the surface it can take a long time and some serious energy to remove. Salt will damage the ice while likely going unseen and will only be removed through time.

Teflon sliders can cause damage to the ice surface if the edges are not smoothly rounded. Static electricity turns Teflon into a magnet for carpet fibers so be sure your Teflon slider is covered when in the club house.

Damage

All curlers will invariably cause small damage to the ice surface every time you curl from Teflon sliders, brushes, balancing aids, stones, and falling objects from pockets. Ice is damaged simply by standing on it! And that is the problem. Ice is in a delicate balance of temperatures with everything conspiring to damage it in some way. If curlers want a game of precision then their equipment must be suited to the purpose of such a game. Those who wish to curl with outdated equipment should consider the additional damage they are likely to cause and seek out newer equipment. A modern curling rink with a modern ice surface deserves modern equipment in good order that will not damage the ice beyond the reasonable.

