

Rule Notification FY2324-4 - Box Dimensions

At its meeting on 11 December 2023 the AFA committee resolved to approve an increase to the allowable width and height of boxes so that the maximum allowable width will be increased from 24 inches to 30 inches and the maximum allowable height will be increased from 18 inches to 20 inches. No other changes to box specifications are proposed. The on trial rule changes required to give effect to this decision are set out below and will be effective from 1 January 2024. The rules published on the AFA website will be updated shortly.

Background

At the 2022 AFA AGM member motions to change the rules to increase the dimensions of boxes and the width of jumps and to reduce the minimum jump height were lost. In March 2023 the Norwest Flyball Club requested the AFA committee to consider whether there was sufficient dog welfare and safety reasons for revisiting the proposals while taking account of concerns raised by members at the AGM.

At its meeting on 1 May 2023 the AFA committee determined that while it did not support a reduction in the minimum jump height it was willing to consider the other proposals and to that end established a sub-committee to review the proposals to increase the dimensions of boxes and the width of jumps and make recommendations as to whether those proposals should be implemented. The sub-committee recommended that the proposals be addressed separately and this notification relates only to the proposal to allow increased box dimensions.

How did the sub-committee investigate the proposal?

The sub-committee compiled a risk register which identified the risk of the current maximum allowable box dimensions. Two main risks were identified:

- dogs having their back feet go off the side of the box;
- dogs having their feet go over the top of the box.

These risks were discussed at length, along with possible solutions for mitigation.

A prototype box was designed and built to the increased dimensions and was tested using dogs of all sizes, ages and abilities to determine whether:

- the identified risks were reduced;
- a dog's performance on the larger box was unduly enhanced by using the larger box;
- any unforeseen risks were introduced.

The results of the testing were that:

- all dogs involved in the testing were able to adjust to the larger box;
- no dog showed a measurable improvement or deterioration in performance over using the smaller box;
- there was no perceivable enhancement to performance of dogs whereby the larger box face allowed the dogs to turn any faster or more efficiently than on the smaller box;
- the risk of feet landing off the box face, particularly for larger dogs, was significantly reduced so reducing the potential for injury.

Potential risks

The sub-committee identified the following potential risks in using larger boxes:

- a box with larger dimensions could be difficult for one person to lift, carry and move and may require two people to take the box into and out of the ring;
- larger entrance to rings may be required to accommodate the extra size and the need for two people to carry the box;
- depending on the design of the box it may be heavier than existing boxes.

None of these potential risks were considered to outweigh the potential benefits of allowing larger boxes.

Are any other aspects of box design affected?

The only change to specifications for boxes is to the maximum allowable height and width. The new dimensions are not mandatory. Teams remain free to decide on the size of their box within all allowable dimensions and to decide on many other aspects of box design such as width and placement of ball cups, angle of the pedal plate, type of cocking mechanism and box frame materials.

How will teams be affected?

Teams will have the number of choices to deal with the change. Teams may:

- decide their team does not have any requirement for a larger box and continue to use a box complying with the current maximum allowable dimensions;
- identify that an increase in one only dimension (width or height) or both would be of use to their team and modify their current box to whatever size they consider best within the increased allowable envelope. For example, a team might decide to modify an existing box by widening the face plate or by adding a strip above the ball cups to add height, while leaving all other aspects of the box, including the frame, unmodified.
- decide to build or source an entirely new box within the increased allowable dimensions.

However, teams do need to be aware that the changes to the rules to allow for the increased box dimensions are on trial and will require ratification at a general meeting of the AFA.

Rule Changes

In Appendix 1:

The first paragraph in the section headed "Dimensions" is amended as shown below:

A **box** must not be more than **30 inches wide** (including carry handles but excluding outdoor staking devices) or **20 inches high** (including cocking devices but excluding mat grabbing devices or materials). Mat grabbing devices or materials must not raise the height of the **box** by more than one half inch.

The diagram in Figure A1.1 Box Dimensions is replaced with:

