# FIA halves fines for driver swearing amid push for balanced race conduct



Formula 1's governing body, the FIA, has recently announced a significant relaxation of its policies regarding foul language used by drivers, just six races into the 2025 season. This decision comes in response to mounting backlash from competitors in both Formula 1 and rallying, prompting the FIA to lower the maximum penalties for such infractions by 50%. The fine has been reduced from €10,000 (£8,430) to €5,000 (£4,210), and stewards now possess greater discretion in deciding how to enforce penalties. Notably, they can choose to suspend a penalty entirely for a driver's first offence.

The context for these changes stems largely from ongoing tensions between FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem and the racing community. In April, rally drivers had successfully negotiated compromises that introduced a distinction between “controlled” and “uncontrolled” environments, effectively delineating spaces where foul language would be more strictly regulated—such as press conferences—compared to race tracks. Ben Sulayem, emphasising the emotional dynamics during competition, stated, “As a former rally driver, I know firsthand the range of emotions that are faced during competition.” These reforms, outlined in the FIA's Appendix B, aim to uphold standards of sportsmanship while allowing for the realities of high-pressure racing environments.

Ben Sulayem’s initiatives reflect a broader desire within motorsport to balance professionalism with the innate emotional stakes of competition. The FIA's reforms also consider mitigating circumstances in penalties for swearing, which will now focus on sports penalties for abuse of officials instead of financial fines. As the sport evolves, these adjustments highlight the recognition that drivers, often viewed as role models, exert significant influence over younger fans.

Ronan Morgan, president of the Drivers' Committee, voiced the importance of maintaining this image, noting that it is essential to distinguish between language used in private or high-pressure settings, like races, and that of official press events. Last season alone, high-profile drivers such as Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc faced fines for their language in these settings, underlining the necessity of the FIA’s new guidelines.

Moreover, this regulatory shift resonates with sentiments expressed by Toto Wolff, principal of the Mercedes team. Wolff echoed the need for a standard that aligns with the values of youth sportsmanship, expressing concern over how inappropriate language can impact young followers of the sport, including his own seven-year-old son who participates in karting. The responsibility of drivers as ambassadors for motorsport cannot be overstated, particularly given the sport's visibility in a family-oriented broadcasting environment.

In conjunction with these changes, the FIA has also engaged with Formula One Management to limit the amount of inappropriate language broadcast during races. Ben Sulayem articulated the need to differentiate motorsport from other entertainment forms, stating, “We have to differentiate between our sport—motorsport—and rap music.” This reflects an understanding of the live nature of broadcasts where driver emotions can lead to unintended expletives, posing a challenge in maintaining a family-friendly image.

Despite these adjustments, some drivers remain sceptical about the efficacy of the FIA's proposed rule changes. George Russell, a director of the Grand Prix Drivers’ Association, emphasised that drivers are seeking tangible outcomes rather than merely verbal assurances from the FIA. As the sporting landscape continues to evolve, the call for driver input in shaping regulations reflects a collective effort to foster a culture of respect and professionalism in racing that resonates with the broader community.

As the FIA navigates this complex interplay of regulation and the inherent passions of motorsport, the forthcoming months will be crucial. With Ben Sulayem's term nearing its conclusion at the end of the year, the broader implications of these rule adjustments will not only influence the current season but may also set a precedent for how motorsport governs the personal conduct of its athletes in the years to come.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4, 5
3. Paragraphs 6, 7
4. Paragraphs 6, 8
5. Paragraphs 6, 8
6. Paragraph 7
7. Paragraph 7

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/f1/f1-swearing-rules-fia-ben-sulayem-rallying-b2750966.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/formula1/fia-reduces-penalty-swearing-after-driver-backlash-2025-05-14/> - The FIA has reduced the maximum penalty for drivers using inappropriate language by 50%, lowering the fine from €10,000 to €5,000, and introduced more discretion for race stewards. This follows backlash from Formula One and rally drivers against a strict crackdown on swearing. The changes differentiate between "controlled" environments, like press conferences, and "uncontrolled" ones, such as race tracks. For first offenses, stewards may suspend penalties entirely. Abuse of officials will now result in sporting, rather than financial, penalties. The reforms, spearheaded by FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem, follow input from FIA World Championships, member clubs, and motorsport bodies. The adjusted rules fall under Appendix B, which guides penalties for misconduct. Notable past penalties included fines for F1 drivers Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc for swearing. FIA officials emphasized that while athletes must uphold professionalism, it's also important to acknowledge the emotional intensity of competitive racing.
3. <https://www.autosport.com/f1/news/exclusive-fia-asks-f1-to-limit-swearing-in-television-coverage/10655492/> - The FIA has requested that Formula One Management (FOM) reduce the amount of foul language broadcast during F1 television coverage. FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem emphasized the need to differentiate motorsport from other entertainment forms, stating, "We have to differentiate between our sport – motorsport – and rap music." He acknowledged that while drivers may become upset in the heat of the moment, they must be mindful of their conduct, especially given the live nature of broadcasts and the impact on younger viewers. The FIA has already asked FOM to minimize the transmission of inappropriate communication to ensure the sport remains family-friendly.
4. <https://www.motorsport.com/f1/news/ben-sulayem-finds-ally-in-swearing-clampdown-in-mercedes-boss-wolff/10682573/> - FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem's push to drive swearing out of Formula 1 has received support from Mercedes boss Toto Wolff. Wolff, who often disagrees with Ben Sulayem on various topics, aligns with him on the stance against swearing. He highlighted the influence drivers have as role models, noting that his seven-year-old son, who participates in go-karting, has started using inappropriate language. Wolff emphasized the importance of maintaining standards and the impact of drivers' language on younger fans.
5. <https://www.si.com/fannation/racing/f1briefings/news/fia-president-takes-firm-stance-on-expletive-driver-radio-messages-we-re-not-rappers-01j8535djx5b> - FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem has taken a definitive stance on the use of expletive language in Formula 1 broadcasts, urging drivers to monitor their language during races. In an interview with Autosport, Ben Sulayem commented, "We have to differentiate between our sport – motorsport – and rap music." He acknowledged that while drivers may become upset in the heat of the moment, they must be mindful of their conduct, especially given the live nature of broadcasts and the impact on younger viewers. The FIA has already asked Formula One Management (FOM) to minimize the broadcast of expletive language in TV productions, ensuring the sport remains family-friendly.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/formula1/russell-says-f1-drivers-want-more-than-words-from-fia-boss-2025-05-01/> - At the Miami Grand Prix, Formula One driver George Russell expressed skepticism about FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem’s recent remarks on potential rule changes regarding punishments for misconduct, including swearing. Ben Sulayem had indicated on social media that he was considering revisions to Appendix B of the FIA International Sporting Code, which outlines penalties such as fines and suspensions for actions deemed harmful to the FIA or motorsport. Currently, infractions in F1 entail escalating fines and possible suspension for repeated offenses. Russell, a director of the Grand Prix Drivers’ Association, appreciated the intent behind Ben Sulayem’s comments but emphasized that drivers want tangible changes, not just verbal assurances. He noted the GPDA’s original focus on safety and voiced concerns that focus has drifted toward policing behavior rather than racing. With Ben Sulayem’s term ending this year and no opposing candidates announced, drivers hope for meaningful rule updates that incorporate common sense and actively engage their feedback.
7. <https://www.racefans.net/2023/01/11/drivers-must-not-use-fia-to-promote-private-personal-agenda-ben-sulayem/> - The FIA’s International Sporting Code, which sets down the rules for all motorsport classes, has been updated for this year to stop drivers and other competitors from making unapproved statements. An addition to the ISC has banned "the general making and display of political, religious and personal statements or comments notably in violation of the general principle of neutrality promoted by the FIA under its statutes, unless previously approved in writing by the FIA for international competitions, or by the relevant ASN for national competitions within their jurisdiction." Competitors are also advised that "failure to comply with the instructions of the FIA regarding the appointment and participation of persons during official ceremonies at any competition counting towards a FIA championship" will now be considered a breach of the regulations. Several Formula 1 drivers in recent years have used their helmet designs or clothing choices in the paddock to show their support for various causes. The new restrictions have prompted some criticism.