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Blunder in Word shows government terror doubts **When will they learn?**

By Will Sturgeon

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The UK government is once again in trouble over dodgy document management, with an apparent split within the government over new hard-line anti-terror laws exposed by a letter from Home Secretary Charles Clarke.

The letter, sent via email as a Word document to members of the opposition, appeared to back controversial plans to hold terror suspects for up to three months without trial, however anybody applying the Microsoft 'track changes' function was able to see Clarke's original wording which expressed concerns over such measures.

A paragraph which was deleted from the final version of Clarke's letter reportedly read: "The case for some extension is clear, though I believe there is room for debate as to whether we should go as far as three months. I'm still in discussion with the police on this point."

This isn't the first time the government has been tripped up by the 'track changes' function. It also proved a thorn in the side of Tony Blair's government during the dodgy dossier scandal of 2003 and highlights the need for everybody to consider what their documents say and what they *really* say.

Joe Fantuzzi, CEO of document security firm Workshare, said today's gaffe is just the latest example of how changes and amendments which get saved into a document's meta data can come back to haunt the sender.

Fantuzzi said it is all the more incredible that this latest blunder shows the government didn't learn from the red faces it suffered over the infamous dodgy dossier.

And it's a problem which plagues the private sector as well. Often remarks added to early drafts of documents which are never intended to be seen come to light. And they can range from the embarrassing – comments about colleagues, for example – to the damaging, such as obscenity or abuse which reaches customers.

"Our own research shows that up to 75 per cent of business documents can contain sensitive information most people would not want exposed," said Fantuzzi.

Fantuzzi said sending PDFs rather than Word documents is still not 100 per cent secure.

However, Adobe is quick to defend the role the PDF format can play for business. Steve Gottwals, senior product manager at Adobe, told silicon.com the company has included encryption, digital signatures and enterprise rights management technology into its enterprise level offering which would halt blunders such as Charles Clarke's but on a wider level will create greater trust in electronic documents.

"By adding digital signatures you get authenticity and integrity," said Gottwals.

Gottwals said businesses are now demanding this level of protection and authentication where documents are concerned in order to increase the sharing of information while protecting the intellectual property and ensuring the integrity of the document travels with it.