

[The governmental cost of doing nothing](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Ambler](#) [2] | Wednesday 5 May 2010



Every new regulation should be justified by an accompanying Impact Assessment (IA). Sometimes, to keep themselves busy, Whitehall departments issue IAs even when there is no new regulation to justify. All these people have to find something to do. A recent example is 'Crowded Places'.

No one would argue that terrorism has increased the risk for crowded places. The Home Office published an IA for a regulation to address the issue on 11th March. These were the four options they considered:

- 'Do nothing' allow owners and operators of crowded places to continue as before, and accept the risk.
- Home Office to publish two guidance documents: good practice for local partners on how best to protect crowded places; and suitable protective security measures for new and retro-fit developments outside the planning framework.
- Home Office to publish two guidance documents as above plus one from the Department for Communities and Local Government aimed at planners.
- 'Legislate, enforcing suitable security measures for the highest risk buildings.' Quite how legislation could achieve this is not explained.

An IA is supposed to compare the costs and benefits of all options but this one did not. The Home Office went straight for option 1, 'Do nothing', which begs the question of why we needed the IA in the first place. Options 2, 3 and 4 were not considered, still less quantified.

Readers thus far might assume that doing nothing costs nothing, or nothing extra. This underestimates the creativity of the Home Office. The IA does not have precise estimates but apparently doing nothing will have transitional and annual implementation costs of '£10s of millions' and '£100s of thousands' respectively. And there will not be any benefits.

It is unkind to suggest the Home Office 'is not fit for purpose': it doesn't seem to have a purpose which it could fit.

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