An Indiana probation department is using a smartphone application to track officers in the field to improve officer safety and offender management.

The Monroe Circuit Court Probation Department began using the Telenav Track mobile application in 2012 following a pilot period. The application has traditionally been used by businesses to track workers in professions such as construction, mail delivery and door-to-door sales. Monroe County is the first to apply it to a correctional setting.

“We were looking at overall safety and accountability of officers in the field, and a way to track an officer if he ever went missing, and this proved to be a good option,” says Tom Rhodes, Assistant Chief Probation Officer/Community Corrections Director, Monroe Circuit Court Probation Department. “It’s also as a management tool. Officers are in the field, often travelling solo, and when they turn in their contact logs, Telenav gives the supervisor the ability to cross-reference to verify that contacts are being made.”

The Telenav application is installed on a smartphone that accesses GPS technology and requires access to mobile Internet. When activated, the software tracks the location of the officer carrying the device and provides a date, time and location record for management to review against staff client contact logs. Officers can turn off the tracking feature when not on duty.

The system is used to monitor home detention and drug treatment cases. Offenders’ addresses are entered into the system as “landmarks” for GPS to recognize when officers are at the residences. The software also allows officers to verify the duration of each field appointment. For officer safety, the GPS tracking provides active and past whereabouts of staff.

The software allows managers to see where their officers are at any time, which Rhodes says is useful in the event a need arises for an officer at a certain location. Supervisors can easily tell if an officer is near the area. Rhodes notes that the system can also serve to verify where an officer was if an offender claims the officer did not show up for an appointment.

The department purchased 12 iPhones for about $199 each and each phone has a per month fee of about $21. The department has 51 probation and community corrections officers who could potentially work in the field; nine officers are normally assigned to the field, each of which is assigned their own iPhone. The other officers share phones.

The department is working with the supplier on fine-tuning the system to automate upload of offender information automatically to Telenav from the department’s case management system, thereby eliminating dual data entry. The department currently has about 100 people on the drug treatment court program and another 80 to 90 on home detention. Currently, as offenders are added to or deleted from the case management system, they also have to be manually entered into or deleted from the Telenav system. Another improvement will allow an automated landmark report arranged by officer, so that in the morning a supervisor can easily view by officer which offenders have been visited in the past 24 hours.

Officers have been getting accustomed to using the system.

“We’re happy with the system, and once we automate everything, we’ll be even happier,” Rhodes says. “Sometimes we have to remind officers to clock in, so it’s just a matter of making it part of their normal, routine, everyday duties.”
Rhodes says the department has had inquiries from other community corrections agencies within Indiana.

For more information, contact Tom Rhodes of the Monroe Circuit Court Probation Department at trhodes@co.monroe.in.us or (812) 349-2000.