



EU fisheries and maritime affairs commissioner Joe Borg (2nd right) and Google Product Marketing Manager Amit Sood



Google Latitude pinpoints whereabouts of family, friends

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WASHINGTON (AFP) — Google on Wednesday unveiled a new feature that allows users to track the location on Google Maps of friends or family using a mobile smartphone.

Google Latitude uses Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to show the "approximate" whereabouts on a Google Map of users who opt into the service and choose to share their location with others.

"You can do things like see if your spouse is stuck in traffic on the way home from work, notice that a buddy is in town for the weekend, or take comfort in knowing that a loved one's flight landed safely, despite bad weather.

"Not only can you see your friends' locations on a map, but you can also be in touch directly via SMS, Google Talk, Gmail, or by updating your status message," Google said in a company blog post announcing the new feature.

The Mountain View, California, Internet giant stressed that the sharing of location data is strictly optional.

"We've built fine-grained privacy controls right into the application," Google said. "Everything about Latitude is opt-in. You not only control exactly who gets to see your location, but you also decide the location that they see.

"For instance, let's say you are in Rome. Instead of having your approximate location detected and shared automatically, you can manually set your location for elsewhere -- perhaps a visit to Niagara Falls.

"Latitude (also) lets you change the settings on a friend-by-friend basis," Google said.

Latitude, which can be downloaded at google.com/latitude, is presently available in 27 countries and Google said it hopes to add more soon.

Latitude works on mobile smartphones and as an iGoogle gadget on desktop and laptop computers. Google said Latitude will be available for the Apple iPhone "very soon."

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