INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (Jan. 23, 2015)– Catching criminals could soon have a new scientific twist. IUPUI biology professor Dr. Susan Walsh is cooking up a database to determine what a person looks like based on their DNA.

“So we try to give an idea of what the person that left the sample what they might look like. This can then narrow down the categories investigators can follow,” said Dr. Walsh.
So here’s how it works: The DNA will be extracted and matched with thousands of samples to conclude what color goes along with that genetic makeup. Dr. Walsh and a team in Europe are already able to determine eye and hair color—now the research is targeting skin color.

“You could have someone that has red hair, blue eyes and very pale skin and you could go out and look for that individual and then test their profile which is then used for conviction.”

The DNA sketches will never be used in court but only as an investigative tool.

The biggest key to this study is compiling a massive database. Dr. Walsh is looking for thousands of volunteers to give DNA samples.

“We’re hoping to do a world wide database so we can get every type of skin color, every type of hair color, every type of eye color combine it into this model so it would be the best predictive tool and in the end we basically give police a print out of what the person who left the sample looks like,” said Walsh.

This is only the beginning. Eventually, researchers would like to be able to hand over a complete sketch of what a suspect looks like to police—all based on their DNA.

“Eventually it will be facial features, height, weight absolutely everything you can define. So instead of a mugshot you would actually have a biological shot.”

The National Institute of Justice awarded Walsh a $1 million grant. The team is looking for individuals to come in and have their mouth swabbed. Their DNA will be entered into the database anonymously. If you’re interested in participating in this research, Dr. Walsh can be reached at walshsus@iupui.edu.

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