NBN enables rural firefighter training

The national broadband network has made it possible for firefighters from all parts of regional Australia to take part in fire investigation training without leaving their home fire stations.

Barriers of distance for inland NSW firefighters were not a problem on the last weekend in May when they connected via video streaming with their colleagues on the south coast of NSW.

Through an innovative program developed by the Canberra Institute of Technology, in partnership with Fire and Rescue NSW and with support from the National Vocational Education and Training E-learning Strategy, regional crews were able to access quality training across the national broadband network.

The training used live-streaming video camera technology to connect firefighters with each other and expert trainers and assessors who were located elsewhere.

“Bringing the training to the firefighters makes it easier for them to develop their skills and this has huge benefits for public safety. For example, more trained fire investigators means a better understanding of the causes of fires, meaning a better chance of preventing fires from starting at all. We can also learn a lot about how fires spread and this helps determine the best ways to fight them.” said Dr Kym Turnbull, the Canberra Institute of Technology developer of the training.

This national broadband network trial involved firefighters from Kiama on the south coast of NSW and firefighters in the New England area of inland NSW. The firefighters logged in to an online training classroom to cover the theoretical aspects of fire investigation using video and other content.

The Kiama firefighters then used live-stream video technology to connect to the training site in Armidale NSW where trainee Fire Investigators were on the ground carrying out a forensic analysis of a real fire scene. A CIT assessor, located in Brisbane, was conducting an assessment of the trainees as they carried out their investigations of the fire scene. All of this activity was watched by firefighters in Kiama using the NBN.

“The real benefit of the NBN is just how quickly information can be streamed across the internet and how firefighters can get immediate feedback on their performance at the fire scene. The national broadband network has made it possible for regional firefighting workforces to acquire up-to-date skills to do their job safely and effectively. Now that this training technology exists, it’s easy to see how it could be applied across all states in Australia, and even across any number of other industries,” Dr Turnbull said.