

How is it that we have got into this predicament? Whose fault is it? At present it is fashionable to try to find the weakest link in the chain of irresponsibility. The finger is pointed primarily at those who make the paper: at the labour collectives and their bosses, and also the engineers. Then there are the directors of the pulp and paper mills operated by the USSR Ministry of the Timber Industry, given that the Ministry has a monopoly on the production of what everyone needs. Every once in a while the latter are hauled onto the mat, made to take part in a "round table" organized by the newspaper and provide explanations. In their own defence they cite the increasing scarcity of raw material resources, the lack of balance between plans and the material supply situation, the antiquated state of the production capacities, the worn out condition of the equipment, the obsolete technologies, the ecological intolerance of the "greens" and the unreliability of the sub-contractors. While this is an unbiased statement of fact it is not the whole truth.

The root of the painful misfortunes afflicting the pulp and paper industry lies elsewhere: in the short-sighted, incompetent approach to the development of the sector. It is precisely the fallacious State policy - the administrative command system - rigidly fettering the independence of the enterprises, the numbering of the sector with others which are of low priority and the allocation from the budget of miniscule sums of money for investing in its development that have condemned the paper industry to stagnation and decay.

The depressing statistics are that only 25 of the 157 enterprises are of post-1960 vintage. About 65 per cent of the plant is completely worn out.