

Around noon a radio report is received that air observer A. Fedorov has spotted a fire in the Radenskoe forest area immediately adjacent to the 30-kilometre zone. Although only one "percentile" is presently burning, in this heat the fire could spread quickly.

The captain sets course for Radenskoe. Konyashkin again pinpoints the fire by radio and determines its area and the wind speed. Soon, we are flying towards the burning forest. The smoke-jumpers fasten the ropes, clamber to the ground and activate the forest sprinklers and entrenching tools. This proves sufficient to extinguish the flames.

"Yes, on this occasion the fire was put out in time", says A. Moroz, Chief of the Forest Conservation and Protection Directorate of the Ministry of the Timber Industry, Ukrainian SSR. It was not the first time during the two years since the Chernobyl' accident that he had been on duty in the zone. "On May 3 of this year more than 100 hectares of standing timber were consumed by a forest fire. Here is what happened. An area of less than a hectare was discovered by the helicopters to be burning and the flight crews reported this to us. The entry in the log reads as follows:

"1400 hours. In the vicinity of Kotsyubinskii hamlet, foliage and needles burning. This was immediately reported to Comrade Ochkatii, Chief of the Civil Defence Support Group, along with a request for assistance."

Hitherto, we were allowed to go directly to the military units, bypassing Civil Defence. Although this was more efficient, recently a bureaucratic wall has begun to be erected in the 30-kilometre zone. I have noticed a curious peculiarity here in the course of the last two years: as the level of radiation falls, the level of bureaucracy rises. This touches upon many problems. For instance, it was not until 1735 hours that Civil Defence responded to our request for assistance made at 1400 hours and allocated 50 men. By then, however, the fire had been