

"And what hurts the worst," adds Valerii Yakovlevich Leshchenko, Deputy Head of the Main Administration of the Cargo Fleet, "is that this year is one of the best ever for navigation. The ice situation in the eastern regions of the Arctic is good. There are huge patches of open water in the area of the East Taimyr Massif in the Laptev Sea. The Bay of Tiksi opened two weeks ahead of schedule. The specialists insist that this hasn't happened in fifty years. But in view of the capriciousness of the North one should never feel too comfortable. Along the northern coast of the Chukotsk Peninsula stands an ice massif, and when the winds come off the ocean the Northern Sea Route is covered in ice. And then the situation becomes even more critical.

What's the problem here? According to Leshchenko there are a number of reasons. Somebody, he believes, has started managing in a new way, and ocean freight, it would seem, doesn't pay so they are having second thoughts... As usual, somebody is being unreliable. At the request of USSR Gosstnab restrictions have been lifted on the transport of export freight from the ports, and that includes ports in the Far East. Control used to be strict. Now some reckless supplier sends off freight without first getting approval from the transport ministries for its passage. Until the matter can be straightened out, the freight is held up, warehouse space is blocked, as are the railroads. These bottlenecks have an effect on coastal freight shipments, which form part of the overall picture. Recently there were almost 800 train cars at a standstill on the Far Eastern Rail Line. Among their loads are goods which, according to the plan, should already be aboard ships.

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