

Within a radius of 30 kilometres our entire countryside reeks of hydrogen sulphide. There is 24 times more of it in the atmosphere than is permitted.

But this is by no means all. In the air which the Segezhanians breathe one notices fluorine from aluminum production, and soot and coal dust from the sawmill and woodworking combine.

In September, for example, accompanied by the directors of the logging enterprises who had arrived at Segezha for their next Council meeting, we paid a visit to the by-products shop of the paper mill. Almost everyone immediately caught their breath.

The director of the mill was not in the least disturbed by this. He even tried to pass it off as a joke. But joking here would be inappropriate. For the people working in that shop are inhaling gas-filled air every minute. Physicians have stated that even low doses of methylcyanide are enough to cause headaches and coughing spells. At higher doses, it may become impossible to breathe at all.

Well, what about the Segezhanians? Could they really have become acclimatised to the point of being unharmed by the mixture of chemicals they are inhaling? Judge for yourselves: in the town there is the highest percentage of sickness accompanied by losses in working capacity in the whole of Karelia, the highest incidence of infant mortality and a progressively worsening situation as regards tuberculosis and oncological diseases. I have no hesitation in saying that in Segezha today there are virtually no healthy people.

No less dangerous to human health and all of life are the industrial effluents from the paper mill. Into potable Lake Vygozero, from where water is obtained for just about all of the communities in the area, one sulphatic soap is frequently dumped in concentrations 1,000 times higher than the set norms. Moreover, the paper manufacturers and woodworking people are pouring resins, petroleum products, lignine, phenols and turpentine into the lake.