

"In 1985, when I began to work on repairing the damage," Smolin continued, "the well had already been dammed up. It was therefore possible to reduce its ecological consequences to the minimum. Dosimetric monitoring was carried out constantly to assess the radiation situation at the mouth of the well, in the area of the crater and in the settlement, which is a few kilometres from the well. The background radiation was normal. But I can speak with certainty about what I myself witnessed in 1985, that is, four years after the explosion."

The damage repair work was directed by a staff headed by the aforementioned Kazakov. It was made up principally of representatives of the USSR Ministry of Geology. As early as 1985 it became clear to this department, which was to blame for the occurrence and subsequent aggravation of the accident situation, that the ecological conditions had improved and that, after the pit had been dammed up, supposedly not even a hint of the baneful poison was reaching Pechora. But in 1987 N. Kotlyar, the USSR Minister of Fisheries, wrote in a letter to the environmental protection commission of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers of the USSR: "From November 1980 to the present, gas and gas condensate have continued to escape into the Kumzha area of the Pechora delta as a result of the accident at well No. 9." And although the minister's letter does not contain any subsequent reference to the nuclear explosion or radiation contamination, what else could explain the conclusion: "Based on data derived from ichthyological research, the contamination of Korovinskaya Guba has not only led to a change in the reservoir regime but has also given rise to irregularities in the biological development and condition of the fish."

Last year a commission of the USSR People's Investigation Committee confirmed these conclusions.