

And so, a fairly large zone, of this same "flabby" permafrost about 500 kilometers wide, runs from east to west through the Tyumen' Oblast. Almost all the major oil and gas industries, and the new towns, are located here. People work quietly, recovering the oil and gas, cursing the mosquitoes and the intense cold, and all the while they do not know that a major calamity is advancing on them. What kind of a calamity?

Scientists in Moscow and in Tyumen' have completed a model, forecasting the climate and soil temperature structure in the Far North of Western Siberia. These specialists assert that the next three to five years will see the completion of a centuries-long stage in the cooling of northern Tyumen' Oblast and that warming will begin and continue to the years 2020 to 2025. The mean annual temperature will rise by not more than one degree. This will be of little consequence for the outlying north and south of the Oblast. But for areas of "flabby" permafrost with "warm" ice lenses, the particular devastation that can be wrought by this warming, is as yet unpredictable. This is what will happen: the earth, stiff with cold, will begin to thaw rapidly, and this thawing will move to the North, with its underground stores of oil and gas, at a rate of 40 to 50 kilometers a year. Then, with time - by the middle of the next century - everything will return to its proper precincts. But how great the losses will be during this time!

Unfortunately, many of the oil-and-gas-recovery enterprises, most presently operating pipelines, and many recently established major industrial centres, happen to lie precisely