

Land Reclamation and Water Management described the situation. "The Bol'shoi Gusinets river bed, which is near well No. 9, is covered with a film of oil for a distance of two kilometres, and gas issues from the well for all to see. Oil is getting into Korovinskaya Guba. According to data obtained by the Hydrometeorological Service, the contamination is found not only in the channel of the Pechora River but also in the southeastern part of the Barents Sea."

Furthermore, as early as 1981 the fish stocks of Korovinskaya Guba had decreased more than tenfold in comparison with 1980.

But worse things were in store for Pechora. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to shut down the well, it was decided to use an underground nuclear explosion to get rid of it.

What happened then clearly shows the rashness of that decision. Not only did the nuclear charge set off at a depth of one kilometre fail to eliminate the gusher. It increased its force several times over by breaking up the friable rocks around it. After many explosions, condensate and possibly, radioactive discharges shot up to the surface. The well started to "produce" 1.7 million cubic metres of gas a day.

"In stopping gushers, there are usually no alternative methods," said V. Smolin, head of the operations section of the Ukhta militarised unit for oil and gas gusher prevention and elimination, of the "Ukhtaneftegazgeologiya" Combine. "Action must be based on real possibilities arising from what is available."

The only thing that was at hand, "available," was a nuclear bomb. It should be mentioned that, after the unsuccessful explosion, possible ways of stopping the gusher, which had grown several times larger, were nevertheless found. After a few attempts, slanting boreholes reached the damaged shaft of "Kumzha" and the gas flow was stopped after all.