

estimated at two million roubles, and then, before too long, experts were talking about 170 million roubles. The orders on this account contained many correct words. The most important element, however, was missing: these documents contained no proposal for creating a service to prevent embarrassments of this kind.

Now, on the threshold of the year 2000, we are setting off on a campaign to develop the Far North for oil and gas. For Tyumen' this will mean primarily the development of the Yamal (Peninsula), where there is a rich abundance of oil and gas. The oil, gas and other natural resources here are protected by a thick-walled, but very vulnerable, shield of permafrost. And now what? Are we again going to lose millions through our own thoughtlessness?

The permafrost in our country is discontinuous. In the North and in the Eastern Siberian foothills it penetrates the earth here and there to depths of as much as 500 to 1,000 meters. Towards the south it thins up to the surface of its shell and begins to occur in small islands and patches. Permafrost, whose temperature is close to the critical melting (point) - zero degrees or lower, "minus one" - is even called "flabby" permafrost. It is extremely unstable: it needs only the slightest inflow of warmth from clumsy human interference and it begins to melt and spread, turning into universal viscous mud. Dwellings and other structures built on this "nonperma" frost "creep" (and collapse) along with their foundations.