

For help I turned to Vladimir Ovchinnikov, a journalist colleague from Syktyvkar who has been studying questions relating to the ecology of the North for several years.

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(Explanatory article follows)

The fact is that whereas the inhabitants of our country learned about the wrecking of an oil tanker off the shores of Alaska almost the same day that it occurred, even today very few people know anything definite about the tragedy at "Kumzha" well No. 9. Nevertheless, in terms of its consequences it can in no way be likened to any other ecological catastrophe either before or after 1980. Although there was an official investigation at the time, headed by A. Kazakov, Chief Engineer of the "Arkhangel'skgeologia" Combine, the commission's conclusions have remained the property of a narrow circle of specialists.

It was not without cause that gas and oil gushed out of the ruptured ground. This was, in fact, acknowledged by the commission: "Technically incompetent work execution... failure to monitor this adequately on the part of the Nar'yan Mar expedition..." and so forth. By 1981 the amount of gas and condensate escaping from the well was 807,000 cubic metres a day. The consequences of this can scarcely be compared with anything else: "Part of the road between wells No. 8 and 9, which passes by river beds and submerged sections of the Pechora River flood plains, is saturated with oil over an area of about 18,000 square metres," is how representatives of the Ministry of