

Dangerously Inadequate Firefighting Capacity
Demonstrated in Forests North of Tomsk

In May and June some 200 fires enveloped 2,500 hectares of the Tomsk Northland, which by July had become the "fire epicentre" of the entire Ob' region. By then, 250,000 hectares of forest had been laid waste by 464 fires. In three logging districts - Aleksandrov, Kargasok and Perebel' - an emergency was declared: fire had begun to threaten the pumping and compressor stations and the oil and gas pipelines. Smoke-jumpers were flown in from Irkutsk, Archangel, Yakutsk, the Amur Oblast', the Komi ASSR and Buryatiya to assist the local parachutists. The Deputy Minister of the RSFSR Timber Industry O. Rozhkov, the Head of the Forest Conservation and Protection Directorate P. Barsukov, and the Deputy Director-General of the "Avialesookhrana" Association A. Belyaev, set up temporary headquarters on the Tomsk taiga, so that problems could be solved "in situ".

Fires continued to rage throught July, with as many as 35 new foci reported on some days and more than 100 fires burning simultaneously. There were radio reports that in the vicinity of Raskino the flames had spread to the oil pipelines and in the Aleksandrov district fire was threatening the oil pumping station. The inhabitants of Berezovka made ready to evacuate the settlement.

At press time, about 700 fires had reduced to ashes and cinders more than 400,000 hectares of forested land. Losses exceeded 10 million roubles.

All this afforded ample evidence that a radically new approach to forest protection and conservation is needed. The present methods of