

The USSR Deputy Minister of Nuclear Power and Industry, Professor V. Mikhailov, says:

"The list of organizations and officials who should know about proposed timetables for tests, about a scheduled experiment, and who should participate in it has been strictly limited by special order of the Council of Defence. This was done not only with the aim of protecting State and military secrets but also to create normal working conditions for the experimenters and to provide for essential safety measures. If the country's Supreme Soviet deems it necessary to expand the circle of such persons, we are prepared to do this."

In addition to the reason emphasized by the deputy minister, there is, in my view, another, but it is one that we aren't supposed to speak about too loudly: scientists and the military have been afraid that news of the planned explosion would raise a storm of public protest, already aroused by fear of radiation, the Chernobyl syndrome, and the long battle over the Semipalatinsk testing range.

In fact, the Novaya Zemlya explosion was postponed three times for reasons that had nothing to do with technical or climatic considerations. Once the best "window" - from all points of view, including especially weather conditions - was missed at the end of October, one couldn't expect a new one right away. And this means that the intensive, expensive and time-consuming work would come to naught, that the program for improving the reliability and safety of nuclear weapons would be disrupted, and, finally, that the country could fall behind in strengthening its defensive potential.

"For our work there is nothing more dangerous than the current uncertainty," I was told by Candidate of Technical Sciences, Captain V. Dumik. "We risk losing not only professional skills that have taken years to acquire but we could see the breakup of a unique and highly competent team of thousands of scientists, engineers and military personnel - a team that cannot be built in an hour's time. And, most importantly, those who developed nuclear parity, this weapon of deterrence, would not be able to train reliable people to replace them."