

Until recently, everything which concerned ships was a matter of secrecy. Hence the gossip, tales, suppositions... Seamen confessed to me that only one or two years ago they could not even have imagined a journalist entering the central compartment. But here we have a dosimeter-toting V. Ishin, radiation safety service supervisor, asking us to don our white gowns. Finally, a few minutes later, the two massive steel doors of the connecting lock automatically open before us. A functioning nuclear reactor stares at us from below.

"This room should give Taimyr residents no cause for concern," remarks Valentin Vasilyevich. "It is reliably insulated not only from the outside, but also from all the icebreaker's compartments. The compartment's containment envelope is capable of withstanding an internal pressure of two atmospheres. Should a mishap occur with the reactor, and the pipes of the first contour are ruptured, no radioactive release would occur. Of course radiation doses in this room are somewhat higher, the dosimeter now showing two milliroentgens per hour. What is this? For comparison: in a single year, each person on Earth receives 100-150 milliroentgens of its natural background radiation. But in an X-ray room one may, in some instances, sustain a dosage equal to what we receive in 10-15 years of work. Our norm is 5 roentgens per year.

Waste. Liquid wastes are collected and stored in special containers on the icebreaker. On reaching Murmansk, they are turned over to the technical repair facility "Atomflot." There, nuclear fuel in the reactor is recharged under the strictest supervision. In the central compartment there is not one opening through which radioactive water could leave the ship.