

The hurricane that raced over Vorkuta at the beginning of February wreaked havoc with the long-time problems of this Arctic city, revealing all the sore spots which people had either tried to gloss over or to which they had become resigned and no longer wished to heal. At this point an attentive reader might tell me that I am repeating myself, that I have already used this clever image in three or maybe four past newspaper articles. But is it really surprising if we journalists, while probing into each new disaster - whether man-made or natural - keep running into such a diversity of "if only's" that we simply can't pass over them in silence. Like delayed-action landmines, old unsolved problems lie in wait for us at literally every step. And if we don't take a good look around and stay alert, and get serious about disarming them one by one, then we're going to have to live in this minefield forever. While it's one thing for us to live with it, it's another thing to ask our children to do so!

I want to briefly recall something I wrote about a month ago. The hurricane destroyed a number of old apartment houses. Roofs were torn off and windows were smashed... but hardly had the storm died down when the town was assailed by more news - a new five-story building had to be quickly evacuated because the capricious permafrost was crushing it like a matchbox.

Under the circumstances, of course, everyone started talking about the new building. The apartment house had been completed, figuratively speaking, on December 31. The entire month of January the builders were still scurrying about in the building applying putty and paint. The 'Raiprofsoyuz' (district committee of the railway workers' trade union) had already allotted the apartments in the building, and the trade union committees of the enterprises had made their decisions. There was a little delay in transferring documents to the city executive committee