

ENVIRONMENT

Log Pollution on Lake Baikal: Help is at hand

Once again departmental interests are taking precedence on Lake Baikal. River workers are ready to transport a maximum quantity of wood across the lake in ships, thereby preserving the lake's cleanliness. "It's too expensive", say the loggers.

But look at the real cost!

The resolution approved by the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers on the protection and rational use of Lake Baikal's natural resources states clearly that towing wood across the lake in rafts must be ended by 1995 and instead it must be transported by ship. There is still plenty of time left to carry out this directive, but should we put off the final solution of the problem for another 7 years?

Those who work in river navigation like ourselves believe that delaying action on this point is a mistake, especially since the responsible agencies have concluded that the harm being done to this great body of water by towing wood in rafts is serious. At a recent meeting in Irkutsk of party and municipal council officials, economic planners, scientists, and members of the general public, a disturbing announcement was made: waves on the lake had broken up a raft near Ol'khon Island. An inspection of the shoreline disclosed that more than 500 cubic metres of wood were floating free in the water and were washed up on shore. Zabaikalles, the organization responsible for immediately gathering the wood and towing it away was in no hurry to do this.

There would be fewer such accidents and the lake would be cleaner if the Barguzin Logging Mill, which dispatched the raft in question, would respond positively to the offer from the steamship agency to increase to 50,000 tonnes the quantity of wood transported in ships.