

Of all the enterprises along our route, this appears to be the only one that is truly doing something about the efficient use of fuel. Under the supervision of the plant's assistant chief power engineer V. Kuznetsov and the supervisor of the power engineering laboratory N. Khukharev, an initiative group of engineers has been operating here for years. Having increased the volume of production over the past five years, the Pervouralsk metal workers have reduced the annual consumption of natural gas by 23,000,000m³.

"And as a result of this, they got into a lot of trouble," says V. Kuznetsov.

The trouble begins as soon as the gauges in the control room of the local unit of Gorgaz register "underutilization" by the consumer of the fuel allotted to him. The profits of Gorgaz depend on the amount of gas consumed, and so they do everything they can to keep gas consumption up. Not so long ago, assiduous consumers were even fined for underutilization of their gas allocation. However, spoiling good relations with Gorgaz is far more threatening than a fine for any manager.

For example, with the present rigid limitations, gas consumption is allotted according to enterprises, almost to the cubic metre per hour. However, the living organism of production cannot adhere to such a strict regime. The daily fluctuations sometimes constitute 12-15%. The people at Gorgaz, which by the way are troubled by this situation, can live with these fluctuations. On the other hand, they can regard them as violations, and act accordingly, right up to the point of turning off the supply.