

Engineering" and the Finnish firm "Neste". The enterprise will produce polypropylene used to make a wide range of goods - synthetic coatings, strong ropes, single-use syringes and many others. The most important product of "Vespek" will be thermoelastomers, or liquid rubber - a product which, as they say, is worth its weight in gold and is in great demand.

The developmental period of this joint company is now coming to a close: contracts are being drawn up and licenses sold. Construction of production shops will begin shortly, and the enterprise will begin operation within three years. There is one special aspect of this: "Vespek" will be built not by our construction workers but by a consortium of Western companies. The contractors are supposed to be "Mitsubishi", "Toyo Engineering" (Japan), "Lumus Crest" (USA), and "Montedison" and "Technimont" (Italy).

"Do we need to have so many foreign firms? Aren't we simply squandering our national wealth?"

"This has long been a pressing requirement," responds V. Yudin. "Our country has fallen behind in the production of an entire assortment of basic petrochemical products. For example, in the production of polypropylene, we lag 2.5 times behind the U.S.A., and even more so in the production of thermoelastomers. And yet, we could produce all of this ourselves in enormous quantities. We are behaving worse than a dog in a hay rick. Despite our indigence we are simply destroying vast wealth."

Yudin's outrage is understandable. The Tobolsk Petrochemical Combine processes annually approximately three million tons of a wide-boiling fraction of light hydrocarbons. At the same time near by, over wide expanses of the oblast, flares annually burn off another 8 million tons of wide boiling fractions of light hydrocarbons. As a raw material alone, this valuable substance - currently going up in flames - is valued at 800 million rubles while products that could be made from this appallingly squandered casinghead gas might total many billions of rubles each year.