

The Ob' Is Seriously Ill

TYUMEN'. "For Official Use Only" is stamped on many documents belonging to Sibrybniiprojekt (the Siberian Scientific-Research, Planning and Design Institute of the Fishing Industry). But now its "secrets" have been revealed and the figures virtually scream out: this great Siberian river is very sick. It is perishing beneath the confident strides of the West Siberian Oil and Gas Complex.

Residents of the region around the middle Ob' River are not amazed by the film of heavy oil on the water -the boreholes are quite close by, after all. But the ichthyology laboratory of Sibrybniiprojekt has information obtained a thousand kilometres from the industries - in Tambey, where the Ob' Inlet ends. The content of harmful substances exceeds maximum permissible concentrations twentyfold! From source to mouth, effluents flow into the Ob' from industrial plants, chemical fertilizers wash into the river from fields, and resins and decay products seep into the river from timber dumped during logging operations.

The head of the laboratory, V. Kroshalevskiy, is convinced that "the situation is extremely dangerous". Industrial development of territories adjacent to the Ob' has brought with it changes in hydrochemical conditions. Suffice it to say that around 122,000 [sic] soluble aromatic hydrocarbons flow into the Ob' Inlet each year. In the northern zone, catches of all species of fish, from sturgeon to roach, have dropped drastically. And though there are still lots of fish, fishing in many places is nevertheless impossible since the fish are not suitable for eating owing to the strong odour