

Trade Unions Discuss Health Hazards to Workers in
Diseased and Dying Forests

The City of Yaroslavl' was the venue for an expanded session of the forests committee of the International Association of Trade Unions of Agricultural, Forestry and Plantation Workers. The topic of discussion: The effect of the state of the forest ecology on workers in forestry and the timber industry.

A forest will take a great deal of punishment. In the process, people's lives are saved. At low levels of air, water and soil pollution it becomes a natural "vacuum cleaner." But all this is for a limited time only. When the concentration of gases and particles reaches a certain level, the trees can no longer cope. They cease to neutralise the pollutants and begin to accumulate them. Thereafter they themselves become sick and die, singly and in whole hectares.

Several decades ago, the first signs were seen in Europe of damage to forests by sulphur dioxide and fluorine. Subsequently, this became an index of critical ecological state. Today, forest biotic communities are in decline over hundreds and thousands of hectares...

These figures were cited at the meeting of the forests committee. In Poland, half of the forests are threatened with destruction. A third of the Hungarian oaks have sustained so much damage that they are of no value industrially. In the mid-nineteen eighties, several thousand hectares of coniferous forests in France had to be cut down and destroyed (burnt). Between 30 and 40 per cent of the forests in East Germany and Austria are diseased and dying...