



Environment

Industry's impact on Lake Baikal

Narrator

In 1966 a pulp and paper mill was constructed at Baikalsk, on the eastern shore of the lake. The plant was initially commissioned to make high-grade wood pulp for industrial and military purposes. Inside the pulp mill the process is much the same as it was when the plant was built. Logs are converted into a slurry of bleached wood fibres. Huge dryers convert the liquid slurry into rows of solid pulp. The drying process releases billowing white clouds of pure water vapour into the atmosphere. Water from earlier stages of the process is eventually returned to the lake, where it could pose a threat to the unique eco system.

Coal is used to fire the furnaces which provide the heat needed to dry the pulp. Combustion of the coal creates acidic gasses which pollute the trees on hills and mountains downwind of the plant.

In the early years the philosophy of taking everything from nature, meant that risks were ignored or unrecognised.

Raisa Zykova (*Speaking in Russian – English subtitles*)

Head of Environmental Protection

Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill

At the start the production technology existed separately from the environmental protection technology. The technicians produced what they wanted and dumped as much sewage in the water and pumped as many emissions into the air as was necessary for their technical purposes.

Narrator

From the beginning there was opposition to the very existence of the mill. The plant provoked one of the earliest and most significant environmental controversies in the Soviet Union. It became a focus for the fledgling environmental movement.

Jenny Sutton

When the Baikalsk pulp and paper plant was being planned and constructed, this caused an unprecedented reaction on the part of scientists that were studying the lake here and who were brave enough to stick their necks out, and criticise the party, or at least to indicate to the party that this was not the right policy.

Narrator

The scientists' main concern was about the contaminated water from early stages of the production process. It contained chemicals that were potentially harmful to the lake's eco system. The fear was that the long-term natural responses of the lake would not be able to cope with this new environmental stress.