

**Kate Brown**, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

### **Abstract**

The official history of the Maiak plutonium plant in the Southern Urals records three accidents during four decades of operation. In reality, however, accidents trailed Soviet plutonium production like a loyal dog, from the very first day of operation. Saving money, plant leaders cut corners on training, facilities, worker safety and radiation monitoring. Worried about secrecy, security officials forced workers to memorize complicated blueprints and procedures and remain in ignorance about the harmful properties of the radioactive substances with which they worked. On a shoe-string budget, plant operators rushed to produce the first bomb cores to end the American nuclear monopoly. In so doing, they produced a nuclear catastrophe more deadly than a Hiroshima-style attack.