Reporting Limits

What are they?
In cases where testing has been mandated by a government agency, the agency may require contamination above a certain level to be reported, even if it is below the level of concern.

How are they used?
Laboratories must use equipment and procedures that are capable of detecting contamination as low as the reporting limit. Sometimes tests show contamination above a reporting limit, but below a health-based standard. In those cases, a community might want to test nearby, to see if there is a contamination ‘hot spot’ they might have missed.

How are they determined?
The reporting limits may be set at a particular fraction of the level of concern. For example, if the legal limit for a contaminant is 20 µg/L, the agency might set the reporting limit at 2 µg/L, which is one-tenth the level of the limit. That way, they will know if contamination is anywhere close to the legal limit.

How are they related to human health?
Contamination levels over the reporting limit aren’t a health concern, unless the levels also go over a health-based standard.