

## Strategies for Reading Environmental Test Results

### 1. Find something striking

**For any environmental test results**, look for:

- the highest result compared to its standard
- a low result for a contaminant that is still very high compared to the standard
- a contaminant not detected, but where the detection limit was higher than the standard
- a contaminant that needs a big reduction in levels to be brought down to the standard

**Changes through time** - For tests at one location on different dates, also look for:

- an alarming increase or unrealistic decrease in results from month to month.
- really varied results (i.e., high, to low, then back to high again)
- results not going down quickly enough in a cleanup

**Changes across location** - For data for one contaminant in different places, also look for:

- much higher results in one place than another
- very high results in a location where vulnerable people might be exposed (a school, home, garden, senior center, etc.)

### 2. Try saying it different ways

All of the newsworthy items above involve comparing one number to another. When comparing two measured numbers “A” and “B”, you can say things like:

- *A is \_\_\_ more than B / less than B* [in units like  $\mu\text{g/L}$  or  $\text{mg/kg}$ ]
- *A is \_\_\_ times B*
- *A is \_\_\_ % of B*
- *A is \_\_\_ % lower than B / higher than B*
- *To get from A to B would require a \_\_\_% reduction / increase*
- *A is bigger / smaller than B by \_\_\_ order(s) of magnitude*
- *A is [double, triple, a quarter of, half of, a fifth of, two-thirds of] B*
- [Draw a graph or infographic comparing A to B]

### 3. Choose the one you think makes the most newsworthy statement