

Strategies for Reading Environmental Testing Results Reports

These reports show the results of tests in which samples of soil, air, water, or sediment were taken from specific locations, brought to a laboratory, and examined to see if the samples show evidence of certain chemicals. They show where the samples were taken, how much contamination was found in each sample, and how the levels of contamination found compare to any applicable legal standards.

A report may be written by multiple organizations. A common scenario: The EPA or DEP commissions the tests and decides where to sample, but contracts with an environmental engineering company to do the actual work. The engineers then take the samples, but contract with a chemical laboratory to analyze the samples. Then the lab returns the raw results, the engineering company summarizes the most important findings, and the agency determines if any action is needed.

Remember, the reports will *not* show contamination in locations that were not tested, or of contaminants for which the lab didn't or couldn't test. For more details about soil or water testing, review the *Soil Quality Guide: Digging into the Dirt* and *Water Quality Guide: Read Before You Drink* on the SFA web site.

Typical Sections

Select a typical page or two from each of the following sections, if available:

1. Narrative summary of report
2. Tables with a summary of the most important data
3. Maps of the site with testing locations marked
4. Tables of full lab results, including results both over and under the detectable limits
5. Descriptions of samples from the field (temperature, pH)
6. "Chain of custody" reports

Categories of Questions & Observations

On the right are typical categories into which questions and observations can be grouped.

An example is given for each, but you don't need to write the example on the posted paper. Just the category will do.

<p style="text-align: center;">Definitions & Chemical Properties</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; background-color: #ffffcc;"> <p style="text-align: center;">What are PCBs? Are they dangerous?</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Testing Process</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; background-color: #ffffcc;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Where did they test for PCBs?</p> </div>
<p style="text-align: center;">Health Risks</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; background-color: #ffffcc;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Could PCBs get into my tap water?</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">Results</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; background-color: #ffffcc;"> <p style="text-align: center;">How much PCBs were found behind the school?</p> </div>
<p style="text-align: center;">Action Needed</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%; background-color: #ffffcc;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Who will pay to clean it up?</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">Other Questions or Observations</p>