

Figure 4.

Number of Participants Posting Messages

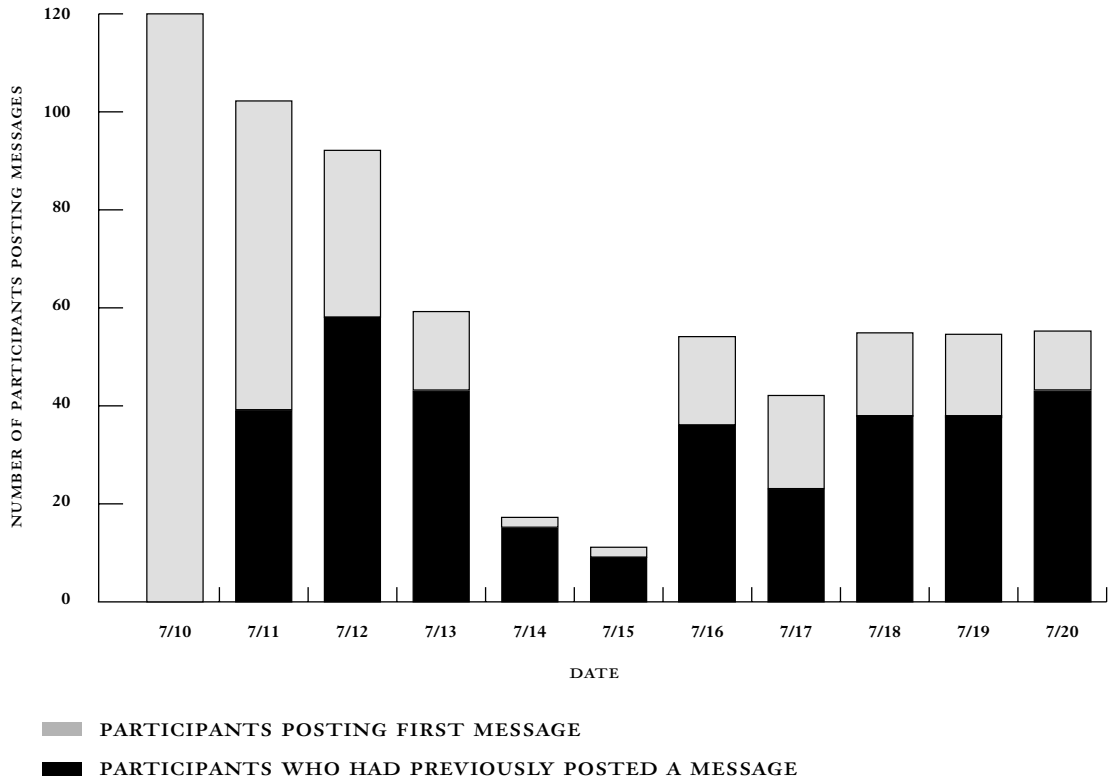
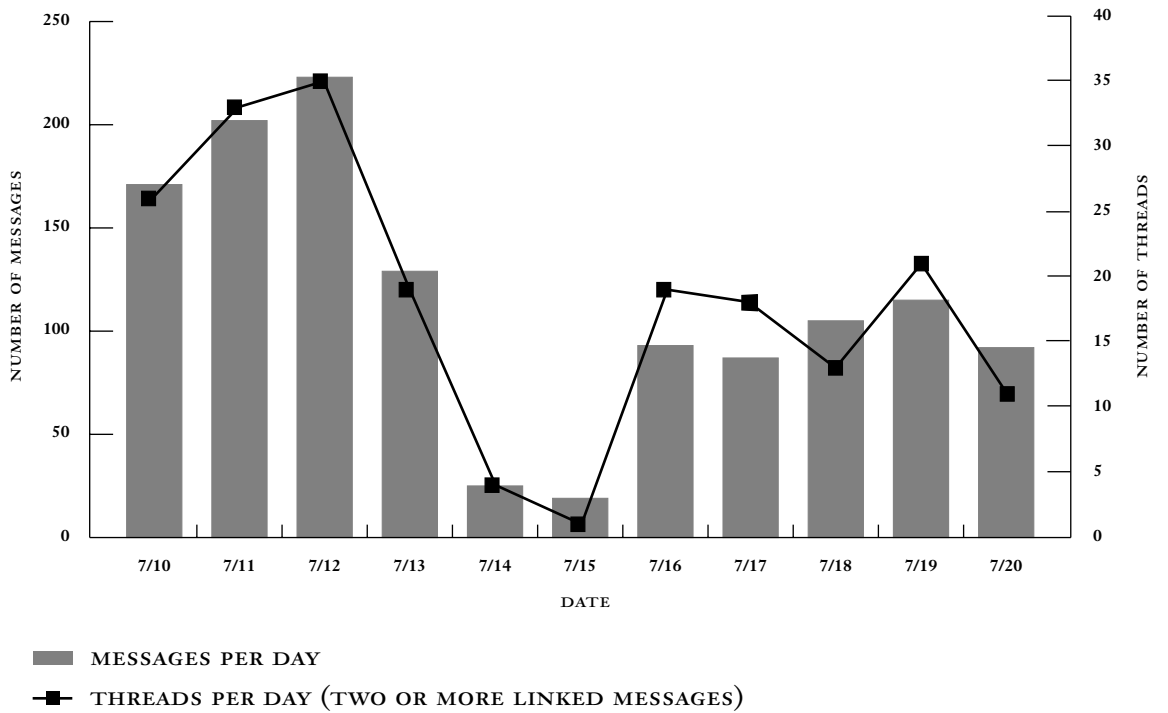


Figure 5.

Messages and Threads per Day



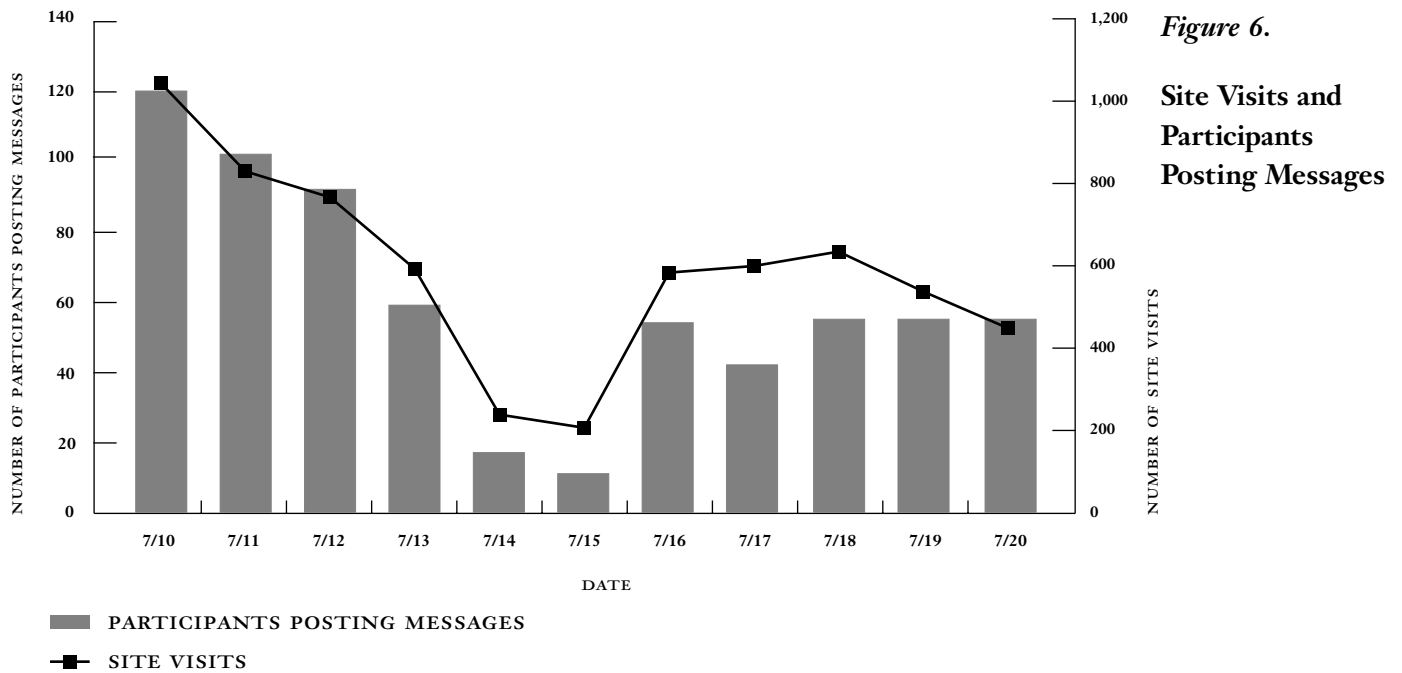


Figure 6.
Site Visits and
Participants
Posting Messages

message.¹³ Based on how many messages people read in their site visits, we can estimate that for each message someone posted, around 70 messages were being read.¹⁴

Overall, much more reading than writing was going on. And the reading doesn't seem to have stopped with registered participants. In the survey, some respondents talked about sending daily summaries or individual messages to interested friends, coworkers, members of email listservs, and others who were not actively involved in the Dialogue. Some mentioned that the Dialogue entered into their daily off-line conversations as well:

I feel the information provided by this Internet Forum will expand beyond the actual participants. I have found that not only the members of the organization I represent, but other friends and family members are interested in hearing just what I have learned from this experience.

Levels of Participation

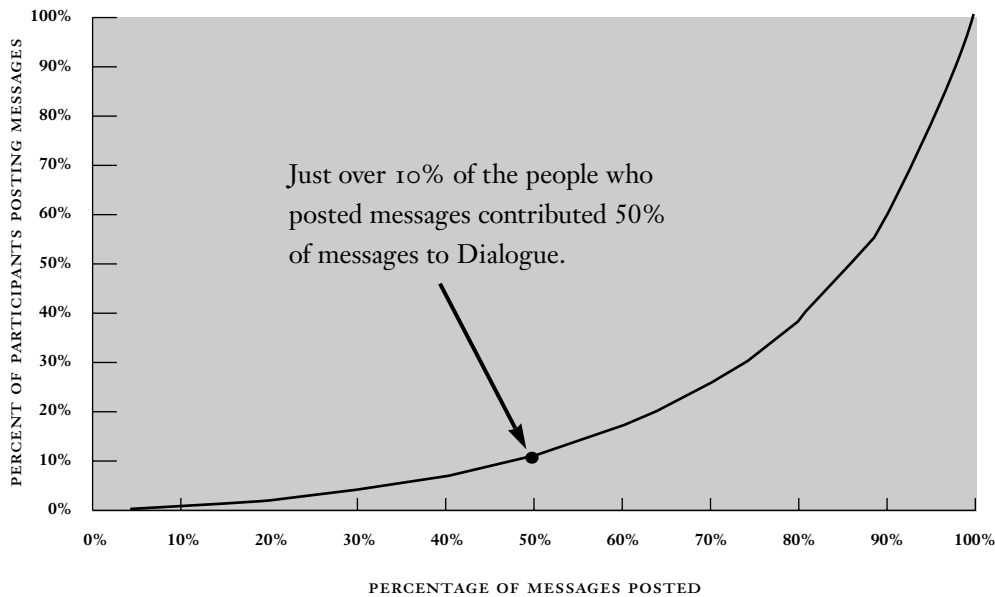
Based on the survey, the median participant in the Dialogue spent half an hour to one hour on the Dialogue on each of three to five days. This median participant read a bit more than a quarter of all the messages and posted fewer than five messages. By definition, half the participants spent less time and half spent more.

Indeed, there were large differences in participation. As shown in Figure 7, a small percentage of participants contributed a large percentage of the total messages. For example, just over 10% of the 320 people who posted messages contributed half the messages to the Dialogue.

Based on the data illustrated in Figure 7, we can identify four concentric circles of activity in the Dialogue: an inner circle of very active posters, a middle circle of moderately active posters, an outer circle of infrequent posters, and a reader's circle of those who read messages but did not post any. The inner circle comprises those people who contributed either 25% of the messages

Figure 7.

Percentage of Participants Posting Messages Compared with Percentage of Messages Posted



overall or 25% of the messages on any given day. These 32 people—10% of the total number of people who posted messages—contributed 43% of the Dialogue’s messages.

Because they contributed so much of the content of the Dialogue, it makes sense to spend a bit of time describing the inner circle. Of these 32 people, 10 were members of environmental organizations or community groups, or citizen members of governmental advisory committees; 7 were university faculty, facilitators, researchers, or librarians; 6 were staff members from EPA headquarters; 5 came from federal and state government agencies other than EPA (including a staff member from a Canadian national agency); and 4 represented industry trade associations or consulting firms.

Members of the inner circle had a deep level of experience in environmental policy and participation but from quite different perspectives. Brief descriptions of some of the environmental and industry participants are illustrative:

- A member of a local environmental activist group in the Southeast concerned with industrial pollution. He introduced himself as a “nobody citizen” who had once worked at a state department of environmental quality.
- Two community cochairs of public advisory committees established by the Department of Defense to advise on the cleanup of military bases. One served previously as a councilman and had a strong scientific background. The other was involved in local environmental issues and appeared to be participating at home in the evening.
- A citizen with a professional background in geographic information analysis who was active in various efforts to clean up a military base in Massachusetts.
- Three staff members of national environmental organizations concerned with the cleanup of contaminated military sites, community right-to-know, and industrial permitting.