A “certified” product has met certain minimum criteria defined in standards and protocols, usually determined by subjecting the product to testing and design review. By contrast, a “code” specifies the minimum level of safety or performance and usually is concerned with the impact of an installed product on public health, safety and general welfare. A code may require product certification or reference standards.

Several U.S. entities are active in the SWH certification, standards and ratings arena. By state law, all solar thermal products made in or sold into Florida must be certified by the Florida Solar Energy Center (FSEC). The International Code Council (ICC) is working with the Solar Rating & Certification Corp. (SRCC) to develop new ANSI-accredited standards for solar heating and cooling. The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials also lists and certifies solar thermal products that have met criteria in various standards developed by SRCC and others. SRCC is the most active, maintaining a certification program and a performance rating program for collectors and systems, and developing consensus standards and operating guidelines. Recently, in response to the meteoric rise in demand for SWH certification, the SRCC overhauled its capabilities, now listing certifications for more than 1,000 collectors and more than 2,000 systems. This, and the presence of competition for this service, bodes well for our industry.

While the term “meteoric rise” might seem to be an oxymoron, in its original meaning, WorldWideWords.org tells us that something meteoric “began unexpectedly and spectacularly but soon sputtered and died.” This would certainly define the SWH industry of the 1980s. We are growing again. To ensure that we do not sputter and die again, we need to ensure that quality standards are enforced, that credible certification is specified and that accurate ratings are required. ST