CHADWICK: This is DAY TO DAY, I'm Alex Chadwick.

MADELEINE BRAND, host:

And I'm Madeleine Brand. Last week, FEMA declared thousand of Hurricane Katrina evacuees are no longer eligible for housing assistance. That has raised the possibility that some evacuees, who have made a home in Houston and other cities, will find themselves homeless all over again. On Friday's program, I spoke with Houston Mayor Bill White who suggested that the housing vouchers were mismanaged by FEMA. And for a response we turn now to Dave Garratt. He's FEMA's acting Director of Recovery. And welcome to the program.

Mr. DAVE GARRATT (Acting Director of Recovery, FEMA): Thank you, very much.

BRAND: Well now what is the status of these housing subsidies? How many people will be found ineligible?

Mr. GARRATT: Right now, we're looking at--out of a population of about 53,000 that are in apartments subsidized by FEMA, out of that number approximately 13,000 households have been found to be ineligible to date.

BRAND: Now, some people quoted in news accounts said they thought that FEMA was guaranteeing them assistance for a year. And that they had signed leases for a year and that they're--they're surprised that FEMA will no longer pay for those subsidies.

Mr. GARRATT: I'm sure that there were some individuals that were surprised by that. The vast majority of these individuals were notified months ago that they had been found ineligible. FEMA moved pretty quickly after Katrina hit to begin authorizing states who are receiving a large influx of evacuees to use our emergency sheltering authority to not just place individuals in hotels and motels, but to also begin placing those individuals in apartments. And we authorized states to place individuals in apartments for up to 12 months. FEMA is prepared to, and will, honor all of those commitments.

BRAND: Is it possible that FEMA has made some mistakes in determining who is eligible and who is ineligible for housing assistance? The Houston mayor told us last week that he actually sent investigators to New Orleans to determine whether or not the housing that evacuees had was, in fact, still standing. And he found that in many cases FEMA had determined that their housing was okay, but, in fact, the house was completely destroyed.

Mr. GARRATT: We certainly are prepared to admit that we can make mistakes, or that we have rendered eligibility or ineligibility decisions that we subsequently find out are in...
error when we get more information. We have an appeals process. We're encouraging everybody who believes that FEMA may have rendered an incorrect eligibility determination to use that process and take advantage of that.

BRAND: The mayor also said that many people who are being basically kicked off the housing assistance rolls are basically not capable yet of paying for their own shelter. And this is what he said on the broadcast last week.

Mayor BILL WHITE (Houston, Texas): It's inconceivable to me that this great country would send Americans back to big tent shelters and Red Cross shelters, some, you know, nine or ten months after the tragedy.

BRAND: That's Houston Mayor Bill White. What do you say about that?

Mr. GARRATT: There have been hundreds of thousands of individuals who have been disadvantaged as the result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The vast majority of those individuals, over the past eight months, have returned or are making real progress towards returning to self-sufficiency. Eight months is a long time. We think that's probably plenty of time for the--for the average American to have worked towards getting themselves in a position where they can--where they can be self-sufficient.

BRAND: Well, in the mean time though, isn't your agency building trailers for these people, for the evacuees who can't find a home?

Mr. GARRATT: Well, we're doing that in the affected states. We're doing that in the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. To date, we have ready for occupancy over a hundred-and-fifteen thousand travel trailers and mobile homes across the Gulf Coast.

BRAND: Dave Garratt is FEMA's acting Director of Recovery. Thank you very much for speaking with us.

Mr. GARRATT: My pleasure.